

THE DAY OF RECOMPENSE

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of this book.

LONDON: FREDERICK WARNE AND CO., AND NEW YORK.

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"THE HEART OF MAN," "ONE IN CHARITY," ETC., ETC.

WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. TWIDLE

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THE DAY OF RECOMPENSE

CHAPTER I

YOUTH AND MAIDEN

THEY had been sitting side by side during the greater part of the afternoon, but for the last half-hour no word had passed between them. They were both young, and one of them—the girl—was exceedingly fair. The young man was not of striking appearance. His face was thin and somewhat sallow, while his general expression was tinged with melancholy. It was only when he lifted his eyes and you saw how large and deep and earnest they were that you were disposed to take a second look at him.

At the present moment he appeared to be intent upon a book which lay open upon his knee, the leaves of which he turned slowly and listlessly now and then.

She was engaged on some needlework, and apparently engrossed in it, for she never once lifted her eyes, and did not appear to be conscious of the presence of the

young man by her side. Every now and then he glanced timidly towards her. But she did not heed ; she kept stitching away slowly, almost mechanically, as though her thoughts were somewhere else. He wanted to catch a glimpse of her eyes ; but the long lashes and drooping lids hid them completely.

Her face was a little paler than usual, he thought, and now and then she caught her breath and sighed ever so faintly ; but the sweet, strong mouth was quite firm, and there had been no suspicion of trouble in her manner during the afternoon. Yet the expression of her face as he caught it in profile was graver than usual, and conversation had flagged between them.

He wondered what it was that filled her thoughts and made her so silent this afternoon, and whether she ever gave a thought to him. They had known each other from childhood, had grown up together, in fact ; had been comrades in many a childish scrape and difficulty ; had defended each other against all comers, and had always managed to spend a large part of their vacations in each other's company. Had they been brother and sister they could not have been more to each other—perhaps not so much. And Kitty had often said to him—

“ Roger, when we get married and have houses of our own we'll be as good friends as we are now, won't we ? ”

"That we will, Kitty," he would answer stoutly; "but I shall never have any other house than this, you know."

"Of course you are the only one, and a boy, while I am a girl, and shall have to go where my husband takes me."

"It will be funny to see you a woman, and married, Kit," he would answer thoughtfully. "I wonder what your husband will be like, and what his name will be?"

"Oh, I don't care much about his name," she would answer. "But he will have to be very strong and brave, or I shan't marry him. Do you know, Roger, I think I shall marry a soldier."

"And let him go to the wars and get killed?"

"Oh, I did not think of that. But I have it. I shall wait till the wars are over, don't you see. Think of having an officer who has been wounded and got better! Shan't I be proud of his splendid uniform!"

"Oh, if you wait till then, Kitty, you'll be getting an old man!"

"He won't be any the worse for that," she would answer frankly. "To tell the truth, Roger, I like middle-aged and elderly men. I think they are ever so much nicer than the boys who call themselves men in these days."

"I don't think I care very much about soldiers," he

would answer reflectively. "They may be very courageous, and all that. But killing people never seems to me to be a very noble occupation."

"Killing people is not the whole of it," she would answer quickly. "Think of defending your country and perishing in a noble cause!"

"But are there not other causes, Kitty, quite as noble that have not anything to do with war?"

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps there may be. But whenever I think of heroes I think of red coats and gleaming swords and roaring cannons."

"But is there no chance of quiet stay-at-home folk being heroic?" he would question. "Surely the soldiers are not everybody, and everybody else nobody."

"Oh, I don't mean that, you foolish boy! You are thinking of yourself again. Of course there must be people to keep shop and look after the farms, and build houses, and all that sort of thing. Don't you admire your Uncle Frank away in foreign parts fighting savages?"

"Not any more than I admire my father, who is always doing good to somebody. In fact, I think it is a far nobler thing to save life than to destroy it."

"Destroying life, as you call it, is only one side of warfare," she would answer, her sweet eyes gleaming brightly. "Think of—think of——"

"Think of what, Kitty?"

"Oh, well, I am only a girl! I can't explain myself properly. But conquest means so much!"

"To us who conquer, no doubt. But— Ah, well, Kitty, there is another side to that question."

"I wish your Uncle Frank would come home. He would explain things, and tell us all about those terrible sepoys. Somehow, I always think of your uncle as quite a hero."

"Father says he is a very daring and reckless man, and that it is getting quite time he steadied down."

"But he isn't very old?"

"Oh no; he is more than twenty years younger than father; and he's been soldiering ever since he was a youth. Nothing else would suit him."

"And every time he has come to Bewleigh I've been away at school, so that I've never seen him," Kitty would answer disappointedly.

"Well, you've finished school now, so that the next time he turns up—if he ever does turn up—you'll be able to feast your eyes on his glory."

Then the conversation would drift away to other things; but before many days had passed it was almost certain to get back again to the old subject.

Roger Carew thought of this as he sat turning listlessly the leaves of his book, and every now and then glancing furtively at his companion.

Kitty had ceased talking about soldiers of late—ever since, in fact, Captain Frank Carew had been invalided home from India. He sometimes wondered if she was disillusionised, or if every soldier was still a hero in her eyes.

Once or twice lately he had tried to lead the conversation round to what at one time was Kitty's favourite subject, but without success. Kitty was more reticent than she used to be on many questions. That, of course, was only natural. She was only a girl in her teens when she used to talk about marrying a soldier, and keeping house, and many other kindred topics. But she was a woman now. She would celebrate her twentieth birthday a few weeks hence, and Roger had realised, not without a sense of loss, that when a girl reaches her twentieth year she is not just the same—that she is less confidential and much more shy and reserved.

Roger was conscious also that he had changed. He was nearly twenty-two, and, of course, a man, and with the dawn of manhood a new emotion had crept into his heart, or else something that had been asleep before had suddenly awakened.

He and Kitty were almost as much together as before, but he no longer regarded her in the old sisterly way. She was more to him than any sister could ever be. It was not as a brother that he loved her, and no sisterly

affection on her part would satisfy the hunger of his heart.

He fancied sometimes that this very love for her made him silent and diffident when in her company. But he could detect nothing in her that would indicate that she cared any more for him than in the old days. In some respects she still treated him as a boy. Though she was conscious of being a woman herself, she did not seem to realise that he had become a man. He was just Roger, the companion of her childhood and girlhood and young-womanhood—the best of all comrades—truthful, chivalrous, and generous to a fault. But the idea that he could ever stand to her in any other relation never crossed her mind.

This was what Roger feared, and in a certain sense resented. It hurt him to be treated as a boy and have the possibility of his loving her entirely ignored. He was as much a man as she was a woman. He believed more. She could be sublimely indifferent to his presence, while he was thrilling with a passion that he had not the courage to express.

It was summer-time when our story opens, and because the weather was warm, with a clear blue sky and brilliant sunshine, they had left the house and had wandered down into the garden ; and, finding a garden-seat in the shadow of a large acacia tree, they had seated themselves side by side, and, she having taken herself

to her needlework, he had taken to his book in sheer self-defence.

He could not help wondering why she was so grave and silent to-day. He was longing to speak to her and confess his love, and once or twice he had lifted his head, resolved that he would be silent no longer. But though his lips moved, no sound escaped them. Somehow his courage always failed him when he needed it most. He had made scores of resolves during the last few weeks, and had composed no end of speeches which, could he have delivered them, would have been eminently fitting to the occasion ; but when the opportune time came he was always dumb. She seemed so unsuspecting, so indifferent to his presence at times, so matter of-fact in her treatment of him, that any attempt at love-making seemed altogether incongruous and out of place. When she did look at him, it was with such a simple frankness that there was nothing left for him but to treat her as he had always done in the past.

And yet he knew that the truth must come out sooner or later. For him she was the one woman in the world. His love had grown until it almost consumed him. He was surprised that she had not guessed his secret before this, and angry that she managed to keep him at the old safe distance.

For half an hour he had sat by her side without

speaking, and yet she worked on placidly and unconcernedly, as if such things as love and pain had no existence. Why did she not look at him? Why did she not recognise the passion that was blazing in his eyes and trembling on his lips? Her very calmness seemed but to intensify the tumult that was raging in his heart.

He got up at length and took a turn round the garden.

"Tired of your book, Roger?" she questioned. And the sound of her voice was as fuel to his already raging fire.

"You seemed in no humour for conversation," he said, turning sharply round and walking towards her again.

"The afternoon is so deliciously calm and restful," she said, smiling at him, "that it is just a joy to sit still."

"You seem in a very contented mood," he said a little sharply.

"Why shouldn't I be, Roger? Isn't the old garden beautiful? While the day is just perfect."

"Oh yes, the garden is right enough," he answered. "If everything else was as right——"

"Well, what else is wrong?" she questioned with a laugh.

"I am wrong," he began.

She was on her feet in a moment.

"Do you know, Roger," she said, "it is four o'clock, and it is clearly no use my waiting any longer to see Miss Dempster?"

"I did not know you came to see Miss Dempster. I thought—"

Then he stopped suddenly, and stooped and picked up a pebble, and shied it at a cat that was walking leisurely across the far side of the lawn.

"Miss Dempster promised to give mother a recipe for removing stains from carpets," Kitty explained quickly, "and I came to get it; but as she is out we can wait until to-morrow."

"Do you never come to Bewleigh now unless you have some special errand, Kitty?" he questioned, with downcast eyes.

"Well, I expect most people have a reason for what they do," she answered brightly.

"You used to come at any time and at any hour of the day—come just when the humour suited you, or when you wanted a race across the park."

"Well, I do now; only I have given up running races and climbing trees—long skirts are not exactly suitable for such exercises."

"But you do not come nearly as often as you did. Once upon a time Bewleigh was like a second home to you."

"It is now. Mother says I am nearly always here. But I really must be going now, for I have to do several errands in the village."

"You must not go yet, Kitty. I have something to say to you before you go."

"Won't it keep until to-morrow?" she asked, glancing at him mischievously.

"No, Kitty; I have waited until I can wait no longer. Now, please sit down again."

"Goodness gracious, how solemn you are! Has anything happened?" And she looked at him eagerly. He met her frank, unsuspecting eyes, and his heart almost failed him, for he saw clearly enough that she had no suspicion of the truth.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN CAREW

KITTY BOLITHO was generally regarded as a very fortunate girl. Not only had Nature been generous to her in the matter of looks, but the Fates had apparently decreed that she should be in time the possessor of unlimited gold.

The Bolithos were not "county people"—at least, so those who prided themselves on being "county people" declared. They could not boast a pedigree like the Carews, for instance. The earliest Bolitho of whom anything was known was a tin-miner, and died considerably in debt. But the later generations had done better. They had speculated in mines and minerals and houses and lands until they grew to be the envy of some of those who could boast a pedigree and a title.

Robert Bolitho, Kitty's father, was reputed to be what in these days would be called a millionaire. And though he had two sons, who would doubtless share the largest portion of his property, yet it was believed that Kitty would come in for a very handsome dowry—in

fact, it was commonly reported that she would have fifty thousand down on her wedding-day, and twice that amount on the death of her father.

That Kitty was much sought after by young gentlemen of long pedigree and empty purses was perhaps inevitable. But she was clear-eyed enough to see through much of the flattery she received, and whole-hearted enough not to be carried away by the prospect of an empty name.

Indeed, Kitty was quite content to remain as she was. She had nearly everything that heart could desire. She had friends and books and pets, and more pretty frocks than she could wear; and when she got tired of Trevisco she could run across to Bewleigh, where she was always sure of a welcome, not only from Miss Dempster, the housekeeper, but from Roger, and perhaps the heartiest welcome of all from Sir George, for, never having had a daughter of his own, he gave an unusually large share of affection to the pretty daughter of his neighbour, and hoped that some day she would be his daughter indeed.

So Kitty's would-be lovers received no encouragement—indeed, they received so many snubs that they were compelled to leave her in peace; and so as time went on they tacitly agreed among themselves that the heir of Bewleigh was the only man that had any chance. Roger appeared to be Kitty's prime favourite. They were constantly together; and since they had

been friends and companions from childhood, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should grow into lovers, and by-and-by become man and wife.

Kitty, however, knew nothing of this. Roger was a dear, good fellow. Bookish, studious, and grave, but by no means her girlish ideal. As a friend, no one could be better. He was true as steel, chivalrous to the core, and generous almost to a fault. She would have admitted without a moment's hesitation that she was very fond of Roger. He was the best, most unselfish comrade in the world, and she could have trusted her life in his hands.

But anything beyond that never came within the circle of her thought or imagination. Roger was not the kind of man to touch the romantic side of her nature. He had never done anything great or heroic. He was neither handsome nor daring. She could not imagine him wearing a red coat or wielding a sword. He cared nothing for hunting or horse-racing, and took very little interest in stories of war and conquest.

Some day, no doubt, he would go to Parliament and make long speeches, and perhaps try to improve the condition of the poor—a matter he was always deeply interested in—and sacrifice himself generally for the public good.

But— Well, if the truth must be told, all this was a little too humdrum for Kitty's fancy. She had

read all the romances she could get hold of. She had wept over heroic knights and love-lorn ladies, and had thrilled over tales of hairbreadth escapes and unexpected victories, and in her girlish fancy had pictured the day when some bloodstained hero, fresh from the wars and covered with glory, would lay his sword and heart at her feet, and plead for a smile from her lips.

It was in this direction her danger lay, but she was unaware of the fact, and, alas ! there was no one to tell her. In her generous heart there was little room for suspicion. No one had deceived her yet, consequently every red-coated braggart was a hero in her eyes, and every lying boast she accepted as Gospel truth.

When Frank Carew was invalided home from the wars, her sympathy went out to him in a moment. Of course he had received all his wounds on the field of glory. How was she to know that vice had debilitated him far more than sword and spear and musket-shot ? There was no one to hint that Captain Carew was not a hero of the first order, least of all the captain himself. He was able to give an account of himself that filled the unsuspecting with wonder. Before the deeds that he had wrought all ancient heroisms paled into insignificance. Had he not served under an ungrateful general he would have been a general himself long since, and had his exploits been recognised as they

ought to have been he would have received the public thanks of the nation. Still, he did not mind. He had done his duty, and a duty well done was its own reward, and the approval of one's own heart was better than any empty title that Royalty could bestow.

Kitty listened with open-eyed admiration while the captain talked. Here at last was a living hero—a man who had won glory and renown on the field of battle—a man who had sacrificed himself for the nation's good, and who was content for all his glorious achievement to remain unrecognised, since he had the approval of his own heart.

Anything finer, nobler, more chivalrous she had never met with, even in books. The captain was quick to see the impression he had made, and adroitly followed up his advantage.

He had an object in view now that his soldiering was at an end, and that was the bettering of his fortune. As the younger son of the late Sir Humphrey Carew, his patrimony was by no means large. The Bewleigh estates were strictly entailed. Nevertheless his father had done the best he could for him, and had the satisfaction of knowing before he died that the younger son was well, if not lavishly, provided for. Stonehurst—part castle, part abbey, and part ruin—was one of the most picturesque places in the county, while the thousand acres that surrounded it were quite sufficient

to keep the captain in comfort, and even in luxury, had he not been such an inveterate gambler and spendthrift. It was his standing grievance against Providence that he was the younger son.

"What does George need with Bewleigh?" he would say to himself angrily. "He doesn't know how to spend money when he's got it. Living as he does—keeping no company, and going in for no style—he is simply heaping up wealth for that milksop Roger; while I, with expensive tastes and habits—a man of the world and a gentleman of the old school, a man who knows how to live and make the money fly—am condemned to perpetual poverty, unless—well, unless I can turn my wits to profitable account."

The captain had great faith in his wits. He had seen life in many parts of the world, especially the seamy side; had passed through experiences that would have had a sobering effect on most natures; had extricated himself from the most awkward scrapes by sheer daring and recklessness, and, generally speaking, had been so favoured by good luck or fortune that he had got to think that he would be able to "pull off," as he expressed it, anything to which he set his hand.

On his return to his native land two things were very clear to him. The first was that his days of soldiering were at an end; the second, that he was not only penniless, but heavily in debt. This latter fact,

however, did not trouble him much—indeed, the mere fact of being in debt did not trouble him at all. The only annoying feature of the case was that, Stonehurst being mortgaged to the hilt, he found some little difficulty in getting credit. While he could get people to trust him or advance him money he was happy enough. To such people he felt no moral obligation whatever. If he ever thought about the matter it was simply to cherish the hope that they would never get paid. A man who lent him money and then wanted it back he regarded as a nuisance. Such a thing as gratitude for favours never occurred to him. A man was his friend who lent him money, but he was his enemy directly he asked it back again.

In this respect the captain was a type of a great many others. Moral scruples he had none. Right and wrong were words that had no meaning to him except in so far as they served his ends. Anything was right so long as he could profit by it. A lie was a virtue in the captain's eyes if it only put money into his pocket.

It will be understood, therefore, that the captain was not on the best of terms with his brother George, while for his nephew, Roger, he had the supremest contempt. Occasionally, while in India, he received letters from his elder brother, letters that were models in their way; but they always made him angry. He hated to

be talked to and advised ; and when Sir George refused to advance him any more money he swore eternal enmity not only to him but to all his kind.

On his return, therefore, to England he rarely went to Bewleigh, but every day of his life he cast covetous eyes upon the estate, and at the same time scorned his own small domain, with its meagre rent-roll.

“ Bewleigh ought to be mine,” he would say to himself, as he strutted across his own lawn ; “ it ought to be mine, and by Heaven—— ”

But he would not finish the sentence.

Nevertheless, he often wondered if it would ever come into his possession. His brother George was getting to be an elderly man now ; moreover, he was troubled with a weakness of the heart that might carry him off at any time. Any sudden shock, and he would disappear to join his ancestors in the silent chambers of the dead. Then, of course, the estates would descend to Roger.

“ Roger ! ”

And his lips would curl with scorn at the mention of his name. Roger stood between him and wealth. If Roger were out of the way he would be heir-at-law. He would be Sir Frank Carew and owner of the wide acres of Bewleigh.

Humanly speaking, his chances did not seem very bright. Roger was twenty years his junior, and though

to a stranger he might not appear particularly robust, yet, since he was not of the reckless kind, and not likely to fall into the way of accidents, he might live to be a very old man, in which case his chance of becoming Sir Frank was absolutely nil. Nevertheless, the captain was not entirely without hope. His lucky star might follow him still, and even if luck failed he had his own wits to fall back upon.

There was still another way of retrieving his fortune which he began seriously to consider. He might marry a rich wife. Not that he was anxious to marry, by any means. There were a great many reasons why he would much prefer to remain single. Were the announcement to appear in the papers that he had taken unto himself a wife, unpleasant and perplexing circumstances might arise which might severely tax his wits to straighten out. Still, if the worst came to the worst, he would have to run the risk. A wife with a dowry of fifty thousand pounds would set him on his feet.

In considering this contingency, his eyes rested on Kitty Bolitho. It was true he was old enough to be her father, though he prided himself on looking ten years younger than he really was.

“Frank, my boy,” he would say to himself as he stood shaving before his mirror, “you are quite a young man yet. And as for looks—well, you have carried off

all the good looks of the family!" And he would chuckle softly to himself.

"And then the girl," he would reflect, "she fairly dotes on a soldier. I see that milksop Roger casting eyes on her, but he hasn't a ghost of a chance while I'm about. Besides, it would do me good to foil him. How I hate the cub!" And he would chuckle again, but more maliciously than before.

So matters stood at the time Roger was composing love-speeches and longing for the opportunity to come when he might ask Kitty Bolitho to be his wife.

CHAPTER III

MOCK HUMILITY

CAPTAIN CAREW had great faith in diplomacy. He carefully adapted himself to his company. When he was with strangers he was modest and reserved, both in manner and speech. He never betrayed himself if he could possibly avoid it. He made a study of each individual, and when he was quite sure of his ground he acted accordingly. With the vain he used flattery, and with such subtle art that they rarely detected he was not absolutely sincere. But with people of strong common sense he was careful to appear bluff and hearty and straightforward.

Occasionally, of course, he mistook his man, but not often; and he was equally successful where ladies were concerned. He always felt that he had a part to play—a personal end to secure. He lived entirely for himself, and everything was made subservient to his own personal interests. This he called using his wits.

Very soon after his return to England he paid a visit

to Mr. Robert Bolitho, and so charming was he in manner and speech that that gentleman invited him to come again—an invitation which he availed himself of for very obvious reasons.

"Now, my boy, you have a part to play," he said to himself one evening as he rode across to Trevisco to dine with the Bolithos. He had made up his mind that he would, if possible, win the affections of Robert Bolitho's daughter. She was pretty, and young, and vivacious. Though, as we have before stated, he had no desire to enter into any matrimonial engagement, yet, under the circumstances, it seemed to be the only way by which he could retrieve his fortune.

Robert Bolitho was a bluff Englishman of the commercial type—upright, straightforward, honest, and loyal to all that he deemed best in English life. He had no vices to speak of; he lived simply in the main, trying to do his duty, and using his great wealth as he thought to the best advantage. He was excessively fond of his only daughter, and naturally very solicitous about her future happiness. It never once crossed his mind that Captain Frank Carew would dream of making love to her.

The captain had already reached middle life, and, though he was exceedingly young in appearance, especially when looked at from a distance, yet Robert Bolitho knew very well that he was old enough to be

his child's father. It is true that he would not stand in the way of his daughter's happiness; he was not at all anxious for her to contract a fashionable or aristocratic alliance; her well-being was his chief concern, and he allowed her to go pretty much her own way, trusting in her purity of heart and in her strong common sense to select suitable companions, and he hoped that in time she would marry a man whom she could not only love, but admire, and who would make her happy in the truest sense of the word.

Over the dinner-table that evening the conversation naturally drifted to the troubles that had arisen in India, to the treachery of some of the tribes and chiefs, and to the bloodthirsty character of the sepoys, whose name at that time was synonymous with everything that was base and wicked and revengeful.

The captain knew his company, and was excessively modest in what he had to say respecting himself. He admitted, of course, that he had been in many engagements, that he had run great risks, that now and then a sabre-cut had nearly ended his life, and only by hair-breadths had musket-shots missed their mark. Nevertheless he took no credit to himself; he was but a humble soldier, who in obscurity had tried to do his duty.

"But, of course, a great deal depends on the character of the officers?" Robert Bolitho questioned.

"No doubt that has its influence," the captain answered modestly.

"But if the officers fail in their duty, or show hesitancy or any particle of cowardice, this would be reflected by the men?"

"That is quite true," the captain replied; "but an English officer would never show cowardice whatever he might feel."

"And if he showed marked courage and heroism, his conduct would inspire the men?" Mr. Bolitho suggested.

"That is also true," said the captain. "In battle, of course, as in other things, a great deal depends on those who lead, and where a man leads others follow; but, you know, the general directs the battle, and the captain, like his men, has to obey orders. I have never professed to be anything but a soldier listening for the call of duty, and doing what I have been commanded to do."

"But if all I hear be true," said the host, "you have greatly distinguished yourself in more than one engagement."

"If you have heard that," said the captain, "I am afraid that report has been too kind to me. Nay, nay, I cannot lay claim to have distinguished myself very greatly. It is true that now and then some very kind words have been spoken about me, and concerning what

I have done ; but every soldier, as I have said, simply does his part."

" Ah ! " said Robert Bolitho, with a laugh, " it is like you, captain, to speak modestly of your own achievements ; but such discipline as that of which you have spoken must greatly strengthen a man, and must weave into his character qualities that will stand him in good stead in all the emergencies of life. I often say to my boys there is nothing like discipline, and by facing danger we gain courage for other dangers. By doing our duty faithfully strength comes to us to do other duties. I much admire our soldiers in this respect ; they are trained to obey, trained not to think of themselves, and such training must do them great good, apart altogether from what they may achieve on the field of battle. It must give them self-reliance, and inspire them with confidence in themselves."

" Ah, my dear sir," laughed the captain, " I am not quite sure that your reasoning is sound. I am rather afraid that, with us soldiers, we have been so trained to obey that self-reliance is rather diminished in consequence. We trust to our superior officers to direct and plan ; we simply do what we are told to do."

" But that in itself must develop courage," said Mr. Bolitho. " No man can go through such campaigns as you have described without being a stronger man in consequence. I am sure that you would be fearless

under all circumstances. Where some of us would shrink from, say, a highway robber, you would at once leap from your horse and attack him."

"If I had my sword I should doubtless do so," said the captain. "But if it were simply a trial of brute strength or a game of fisticuffs, I don't know but that I might assume that discretion were the better part of valour, and, instead of fighting, run away."

"Nay, nay, captain; that is not your nature. I am sure you would not think of personal danger; you would simply feel that your business was to punish the rascal who should dare to attack you, and I fancy that you would not fail in the encounter."

"At any rate, I hope the circumstances will not arise," laughed the captain, "for I should not like to lose your good opinion of me, Mr. Bolitho."

So in this way conversation ran on, while Kitty, sitting on the opposite side of the table, looked at the captain with wide-open eyes and a heart throbbing with admiration. The more she saw of him the more she admired his modesty and his valour. Here was her hero realised in flesh and blood.

Later in the evening the captain managed to secure half an hour's quiet conversation with Kitty in the drawing-room. The young men had retired to the billiard-room, and Robert Bolitho had been summoned to his library on some business matters, so that the

coast was quite clear, and Captain Carew made the best of his opportunity. He saw by the light in Kitty's eyes that she was greatly interested in his exploits; moreover, he was convinced that she was more credulous than her elders, and that he might do a little romancing on his own account, and it would be accepted by her as absolute truth.

"Did you ever kill a man, captain, with your own hands?" she asked timidly.

"I am sorry to say, Miss Kitty, that I have had to kill a good many—of course, in self-defence. I abhor the idea of shedding blood; it is very terrible to contemplate it, but sometimes one is so driven or so circumstanced that he has to fight or die, and fighting means death to those who are vanquished."

"And you have been in those circumstances, captain?"

"Well, on a few occasions I have found myself surrounded by yelling savages, and there was only one thing to do, and that was to fight my way out over their dead bodies."

"And does it not feel horrible to thrust your sword into living beings, and see them fall dead at your feet?"

"I cannot describe to you, Miss Kitty, the horror of the situation. Only a sense of duty and the natural instinct of self-preservation would induce one to do it;

but please do not let us talk of such things. I would like to forget them."

"I sometimes wonder, captain, how a man so tender-hearted as you ever became a soldier."

"Ah! well, you see, Miss Kitty, I was a younger son. There is little for a younger son to do unless he goes in for soldiering, in these times of strife and unrest. Moreover, when one is young he does not think of danger, or of the horrors of battle; he only realises that when he is in the thick of it, and there is no way of escape."

"And if you had waited until you were older, captain, you think you never would have been a soldier?"

"I'm not quite sure of that, Miss Kitty. A man owes something to his country, you know. There must be soldiers, or who would protect our fatherland, or win new territories beyond the sea? So it may be that my love of country might still have induced me to go out with others to battle."

"But you do not love war for its own sake, captain?"

"Nay, Miss Kitty, I abhor it! I cannot tell you what a nightmare it is to me sometimes to think that, even in self-defence, I have been compelled to shed blood, though it be the blood of savages—nay, of fiends—who deserve no mercy at our hands."

"Then in some respects it is a relief to you to know

that your soldiering days are over, and that you will not be called upon again to go out to fight?"

"In some respects, yes; in others, no. When I see so many young men who are content to stay at home and live in ease, and evade every hardship and peril; who care nothing, to all appearances, about home or fatherland; who are not willing to sacrifice a day's ease or a drop of their blood, I feel almost sorry that I am no longer able to prove my patriotism and my devotion to the Throne by going forth to battle in the sacred cause of Liberty."

"But all men are not fitted by Nature, captain, to be soldiers, you know; and then there must be some to stay at home—to look after the womenfolk, for instance, to till the land, and carry on the industries of the country. If all our young men went forth to battle, what would become of the commerce of the country, and who would look after the work of the cities and of the fields?"

"Ah, what a wise little head you have, Miss Kitty!" said the captain, with a smile. "You take a true view of life, after all. Of course there must be those who stay at home, and they who stay at home and do their duty I greatly admire. I simply speak of the drones who do nothing at home, and will not go out to war."

"Such as they, of course, deserve no sympathy or

admiration ; but when a man does his duty at home he is surely deserving of praise ? ”

“ That is quite true,” said the captain. “ My nephew Roger, for instance—he was never intended by nature to be a soldier ; but nature intended him for other work, which, as far as I can learn, he is doing exceedingly well. No doubt, in time, he will go to Parliament, and perhaps will distinguish himself as a statesman.”

“ Roger is a very noble young man,” Kitty answered, after a pause. “ We have been friends, you know, all our lives.”

“ I am glad you think so well of him,” the captain answered. “ Personally I take a great interest in him. Blood, you know, is thicker than water, and to see him happy and useful is a great pleasure to me, and I hope I may live long enough to see him distinguished.”

“ Of course, captain, he will never be distinguished as you are, but I hope that in time he will distinguish himself in other ways. He is very learned, you know, in many things, and at the University he carried all before him.”

“ Yes, Roger is a young man to be envied. Providence has been kind to him, and he is deserving of the position he has, and of the greater position he will fill in years to come. Ah, Miss Kitty, if Providence had only singled me out for a similar position, how I should

have rejoiced!" And the captain dropped his eyes and sighed.

"But your life has been very glorious, captain."

"No, we will not call it glorious," he answered; "glory is too strong a word. You know, a soldier's life is a life of hardship and danger and anxiety; he is cut off from the sweets of home and many of the joys of companionship; he has to live solitary and alone, knowing nothing of the sweetest of human ties very frequently. Ah, when a man can win the girl he loves in the days of his youth, and settle down with her in peace in some quiet home, and see his children grow up around him, and feel the blessedness of the sweetest of all ties and companionships, such a man as that is to be envied!" And the captain sighed again.

"But even soldiers realise sometimes all that you have been speaking of," Kitty said, with a blush.

"Sometimes, perhaps, but not so often. After they have served their country, and returned invalided and helpless, how is it possible that the dream of youth can be realised? A soldier is but a poor, broken-down individual in his after years, and is almost compelled to dwell solitary and alone."

"I do not quite see that," Kitty answered, blushing again. "Life does not end when youth is past. Nay, one likes to think that the best of life comes later on."

"Ah, Miss Kitty, you say that because you are young"—and the captain dropped his voice to a whisper—"it is the nature of youth, you know, to look at life through rose-coloured spectacles; but look at me. Here am I doomed to solitude and suffering. Not that I would complain. I have lived my life to the best of my ability, and what remains of it now I must make the best of, and be content to walk with my own poor self for my companion to the end of my days."

"Oh, captain, I am sure——" And then Kitty paused suddenly, while a warm blush swept over her neck and face.

"You are sure of what, Miss Kitty? That I might even yet win myself a wife?"

"Well, surely, captain," she said, with a laugh, "if you wanted some one to preside over the destinies of Stonehurst, why, I should think there would be no great difficulty in the way."

"I might, perhaps, secure some middle-aged spinster whose beauty had vanished, and whose love was dead; but that is not my ideal of matrimony, Miss Kitty."

"But why some middle-aged spinster, captain? You are not an old man yet."

"I am too old for youth and beauty to look at me," he answered, with a sigh. "If I could only be young again, and realise the dream of youth—if I might only

dare to look into the sweet eyes of——” And he turned away his head and sighed dismally.

“ I am sure you are looking at life too seriously,” she said, without raising her eyes; “ and some day I shall see you very happy, and in the way you desire.”

“ Never, Miss Kitty; I can never be happy now! Unfortunately, my heart has gone out to one who is young and beautiful and accomplished; but she is but a girl, and spring cannot wed with winter.”

“ Oh, captain, how I pity you! And is she very fair?”

“ She is more beautiful than any words of mine can picture her, and as good as she is beautiful.”

“ And you have spoken to her and been rejected?” Kitty questioned, with deep interest in her voice.

“ Nay, I have never dared to speak to her. I should be ashamed of myself to make such a confession.”

“ But she may love you,” Kitty said, “ though she is but a girl. Girls sometimes admire those who are older than themselves.”

“ Ah, if I could only think that I should indeed be a happy man,” the captain said; “ but the thought is too good to be true!”

Kitty lifted her eyes timidly to the captain; but she did not reply, and, emboldened by her look, he went on—

"You know the fair girl who has stolen away my heart, Miss Kitty—know her intimately, for she dwells beneath this roof and is even in this——"

But the captain did not finish the sentence. With a hot blush sweeping over her face, Kitty rose suddenly to her feet, trembling in every limb, moved and deluged by a torrent of emotion such as she had never experienced before.

"Oh, captain, hush!" she gasped at length. "Do not speak another word!" And, raising her hands suddenly to her temples, she turned and rushed out of the room.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW EXPERIENCE

THE conversation between Captain Carew and Kitty Bolitho took place the day before that on which our story opens. Outwardly, Kitty was calm enough as she sat by Roger's side intent on her sewing, and, save that she was paler than usual and less disposed to talk, she gave no indication of the tumult that was raging in her heart.

At present she was not at all sure of herself. The captain's confession had come so suddenly, had taken her so completely by surprise, that she hardly knew whether to rejoice or to be sorry, whether to be pained or flattered. As a matter of fact the captain had been less diplomatic than usual. He had been too precipitate, and had mistaken the look of very evident admiration in Kitty's eyes for a much warmer feeling.

That Kitty admired the captain very much she frankly admitted to herself. As she lay awake that night thrilling with a new and strange excitement she faced the situation fearlessly. She knew that she had

reached a turning-point in her life and had passed suddenly from a girl into a woman. Life could never be exactly the same to her again. Its burden and responsibilities had been laid upon her heart, and she would have to bear them alone.

Up to the present she hardly knew what responsibility meant. She leaned upon her parents in everything, confided in them in every perplexity. She had no burdens of her own, no cares, no responsibilities. But now all this was changed. She felt that she could not take her parents into her confidence—at least, not just yet. She must find her own way, make her own choice. When she had looked at the question from every side and decided what was right and best to do, then she would take them into her confidence and ask them to approve her decision.

The situation was not without its compensations. The feeling that she was no longer a child led by others, but a full-grown woman choosing her own way and deciding her own destiny, had in it a curious sense of exhilaration. It was as though she had reached a lofty mountain summit. There might be dangerous precipices on every side, and a step too far in this direction might mean disaster of the most appalling kind. Nevertheless there was the sense of height and freedom with larger vision and more commanding knowledge. In a certain sense she had reached the

crown of her life. She was loved, and by a soldier and a hero.

In the first intoxication of the captain's confession she felt as though all her girlish dreams had come true, and all her budding hopes had burst into flower. The thrill of being loved stole over her heart like a psalm, and quelled all querulous voices and hushed every note of complaint. She never knew why it was that she did not respond to the captain's appeal then and there. Had she done so, there would have been a very different story to tell. But something, she knew not what, held her back. Perhaps it was the assertion of her own judgment and common sense. Perhaps it was a whisper of the good Spirit which is sent to guide us all. Anyhow, she asked for time to think; and directly the door closed behind her she knew she had done the right thing.

During most of the night, as she lay tossing on her pillow, she had very little doubt as to what her answer would be. What she had often pictured in her girlish dreams had come true, and it would seem like flying in the face of Providence to dash away the cup now that it was close to her lips.

She would not make her love too cheap. She would keep the captain waiting a day or two—perhaps a few weeks. She would permit him to declare himself more fully and completely. She would hear from his lips

some passionate love speeches, and then she would smile upon him and place her hand in his.

How proud she felt as she lay, with wide-open eyes, staring into the darkness! But there was no darkness for her. She was not conscious that night lay upon the land and wrapped it in silence. It was daylight and summer-time, and the world was full of music and gladness and beauty.

Love is not discounted because it is bestowed on the worthless. We grow rich not in being loved, but in loving. It may not always bless him who receives, but it blesses him who gives. The loss comes, not when he who receives is proved to be unworthy, but when the heart ceases to love.

And even the passion or sentiment that we sometimes mistake for love has a similar power. If it may not transmute the baser metals and change the dross into gold, it polishes the brass and the pinchbeck until they glow like the rarer metal, and the dimness only comes back when the true nature of the passion is discovered.

Kitty felt quite sure that she loved the captain, and her heart seemed to grow suddenly rich, and the world become a far happier and more beautiful place than it had ever been before. She did not attempt to analyse her feelings. In a vague way she felt that lying at the bottom of all the rest was her admiration of the captain's courage and valour, and somehow it was such an honour

for a mere girl to be loved by so great a hero. Then, also, he was not a mere boy. Had he been her own age, or even a year or two older, she was quite sure she would have felt very differently. But here was a man whom she could look up to and reverence. And then there was no denying that he was very handsome, especially at a distance. Of course, he was sunburnt and scarred, and his fair hair was just beginning to be tinged with grey, and there were crows' feet in the corners of his eyes, and wrinkles on his cheeks and forehead. But these things only added to his dignity, and made him all the more worthy to be loved.

She fell asleep at length, and when she awoke it was broad day, and, somehow, the daylight made a difference. This is often so. In the glow of the lamps and candles tinsel gleams like cloth of gold, and paste sparkles like diamonds of purest water; and cheeks are red and eyes are brilliant and shoulders are dazzling white and fair. But when the light of day steals through the windows the candles burn yellow and sickly, and the tinsel turns black, and eyes lose their lustre and cheeks their colour. The daylight is very impartial.

Kitty felt as though she had been dreaming. There was a sense of unreality over everything. A good deal of the thrill and ecstasy had gone out of her heart. She was on the summit of the mountain still, but she was not sure that she was not hanging over a precipice.

She was confident when she fell asleep; now she was doubtful and uncertain of herself.

During the forenoon she was restless and absent-minded, and not a little apprehensive. She wondered if the captain would find an excuse for riding across to Trevisco again; wondered if his sobered judgment of to-day would approve of what he said last night; wondered if she really loved him, or if what she felt was a mere fancy, built on admiration; wondered if she ought to encourage him, or whether it was not her duty to keep him at a distance until they both knew their own minds; wondered if she ought not to take her father into her confidence at the beginning, and trust to his superior judgment to guide her; wondered what Roger would think if he knew.

The captain, however, did not ride over during the forenoon, and on the whole she was glad. She did not yet feel completely master of herself, and was half afraid lest she should do or say something rash and regret it afterwards.

In her heart she was a little afraid of the captain. He was so strong and resolute, and if he came and pressed for an immediate answer she was almost sure she should say "Yes," and she did not want to bind herself just yet. She wanted a few days more to think.

After lunch she hunted up an excuse for running

across to Bewleigh. If the captain came she would be out of his way. It cost her an effort to go. She was longing to see her lover again. It was all so new and strange and sweet to be loved that it was positive pain to put away from her any of the sweet intoxication. But her judgment came to her rescue. It was better she should be out of the way for this one day at least.

So, after lunch, she donned an old straw hat, and struck out across the fields in the direction of Bewleigh. No other place, she believed, could have drawn her away from the chance of seeing the captain, and no other company would suit her present mood as well as that of Roger. Whatever might come or go she would always have a warm place in her heart for her old play-fellow. Roger was always the same—gentle, kind, and chivalrous. She was glad that the captain had seen his good qualities and admired them. She was not quite sure that she could ever love a man who said a word against Roger.

But of course the captain was bound to admire his nephew. It was of the nature of goodness to recognise goodness wherever it may be found, and since the captain himself was so good and true, it was inevitable that he should recognise kindred qualities in his kin.

Kitty was not at all disappointed that Miss Dempster was out, or that Sir George was taking his afternoon nap. It was Roger she wanted to see. He

understood her better than any one else, and she could be freer with him almost than with his own father.

" You are not busy, Roger ? " she questioned.

" Nay, Kitty," he answered, with brightening eyes.
" I am at your service."

" I wanted some one to talk to," she said laughingly.
" It's terribly dull at Trevisco. All the male kind are off the premises."

" I'm glad you've come, for it's dull here sometimes. And you've a wonderful way of brightening things up generally."

" Have I ? I did not know. But suppose we go out of doors ? I don't suppose Miss Dempster will be long before she is back."

" I shall be glad to get out into the sunshine," he answered, " for I have been hard at work all the morning."

" Sticking to your books as usual ? You will be getting awfully learned in time, Roger."

" Not much fear of that," he answered, as they sauntered away together.

But, as we have seen, conversation soon flagged between them, and the afternoon on the whole was a very silent one. Kitty was unable to keep the captain out of her mind. His handsome, sunburned face came up before her constantly, his words echoed and re-echoed through the chambers of her brain like

the chimes of St. Mullion bells. She hardly saw Roger during the whole of the afternoon—was hardly aware of his presence.

When, however, she sat down again at his request, and looked into his deep, earnest eyes, she realised very vividly that he had been with her all the while.

"Do be quick, Roger, and say what you have to say," she said, "for it is much later than I thought."

"I will be as quick as I can," he answered huskily. "But cannot you guess, Kitty, what I wish to say?"

"I haven't the ghost of an idea," she answered, with apparent indifference. "I hope it is nothing very serious."

"You surprise me a good deal sometimes, Kitty," he said, after a pause. "You are generally so sharp and far-seeing that I wonder you have not guessed at the truth long before this."

"What truth, Roger?"

"That I love you, Kitty!"

She rose to her feet in a moment and drew away a step or two, and then she burst out into a silvery laugh.

"Of course you love me, Roger! Why, we have loved each other since we were little children!"

"I fancy you think we are children still," he said a little bitterly.

"Oh no, I do not!" she answered, becoming suddenly sober. "I sometimes wish we were. It's stupid to change simply because we have grown up."

"I have not changed, Kitty, save that my boyish affection has grown into a man's passionate love!"

"Oh, Roger, please don't! Now you are spoiling yourself and spoiling everything! Why can't we be as we have always been?"

"Simply because we cannot always remain children, Kitty. You are a woman, and I am a man; and I have awakened to the fact that I love you with a man's deep and absorbing love."

Kitty looked at him for a moment in bewildered silence, and in that moment there came up before her very vividly the scene of the night before, and somehow she could not help contrasting the somewhat stagey love-making of the captain with this simple, straightforward confession of Roger.

Yet Roger's confession awoke no thrill of ecstasy in her heart. Of the genuineness of his love she did not doubt, and her eyes filled with unbidden tears; but they were tears of pity. She saw that he was suffering, and she would infinitely rather suffer herself than give him pain. And yet what could she do? Her position would have been almost laughable but for the pain of it. She wondered if any girl ever found herself in such a position before. It was not often, she thought, that

a girl received two confessions of love within the space of twenty-four hours. And then, for the first time, a half-defined doubt flitted across her mind.

Did the captain love her ? He was no longer a youth, and she had read in books that the fierce passion of youth cools and expires with the advance of years.

But she had no time to debate the question. Roger was standing before her, very pale and resolute, but with a look of infinite pain in his eyes, and her heart smote her cruelly.

"Oh, Roger," she said, "I am very sorry for you ! I never dreamed of you loving me in that way."

"And can you give me no word of hope, Kitty ?" he pleaded.

"How can I ?" she asked. "We have been like brother and sister. I have always been very fond of you, and always shall be. You are the best friend and companion any girl ever had——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that !" he said hastily ; "but we cannot remain children always. I shall wish we had never been born if—if——"

"Oh, Roger, think better of it ! Perhaps you are mistaken. You will see some one yet that you will care for very much better than you care for me."

"I never shall," he broke in bitterly. "I shall never love any but you, Kitty ; and if you spurn my love I shall not care what becomes of me ! It is not a child's

passion that has grown up in an hour. To love you is my life, Kitty, and without your love nothing else is worth having! Oh, Kitty, say you will try to love me!"

"I cannot, Roger, in the way you mean. Oh, I hate to give you pain! It hurts me as much as it hurts you. Please let us forget this hour and be as we have always been!"

"And this is your final answer?" he asked in a low, despairing tone, and with a look in his eyes the like of which she never saw before.

"Oh, Roger, don't!" she cried. "Don't you see how hard it is for me?"

"God forgive me, Kitty, and—and forgive you also!" And, with a sudden gesture, he turned on his heel and strode away across the lawn, and in a few moments had vanished from her sight.

CHAPTER V

THE BITER BITTEN

AS Captain Carew rode homeward from Trevisco after his interview with Kitty he was conscious of a feeling that was entirely new and strange. He could not help wondering what it was that ailed him, and he tried in his somewhat rough-and-ready fashion to analyse the emotion. He scouted the idea of being in love, and yet, if he was not in love now, he could not understand what it was that so affected him.

He prided himself upon the fact that his experience of womankind had been wide and varied. In his heart he believed that he had no reverence for any woman; they were just pretty dolls when they were young, to be petted and amused and admired for a day or a week or a month, and then to be thrown aside and forgotten. That there was such a thing as a pure, genuine, abiding love he did not believe, and those who proclaimed such a doctrine he regarded as simpletons, or something worse. Yet, after this last interview with Kitty, he

confessed that he was in danger of becoming a simpleton himself.

She was so sweet, so ingenuous, so truthful, so free from guile, that she touched his heart in a way that he did not understand. No other woman of his acquaintance had ever come so near his ideal before—for he had a vague ideal in his mind, though he never believed that its realisation was possible. Yet here was a girl more like the girl of his imagination than he had ever met with before, so completely genuine, so entirely unspoilt by the world, so free from vanity, so entirely guileless, that even his rough and coarsened nature was touched by it into something like reverence.

He had been drawn to Kitty's side in the first instance by purely selfish motives. He would not have thought of her for a moment but for the fact that she was an heiress on a somewhat large scale, and he was driven to do something desperate in order to rehabilitate his fortune. That he might care for her more than he cared for any other woman never crossed his mind.

That she might fall in love with him he deemed not merely possible, but probable. She was young and impressionable, with a strong element of romance in her nature. He saw at the beginning of their acquaintance how she was moved by his stories of travel and danger and heroism, and he had worked on this side

of her nature with steady persistency. When he saw her eyes kindle and her bosom heave, he congratulated himself that he was using his wits to great advantage; but that he might fall in love with her was something that never came within the circle of his thoughts or imagination.

He understood women so well, had seen so much of the world and life, had had so many experiences of an unedifying character, that he laughed at the idea of Cupid's gentle dart piercing the hard crust of his worn and withered heart.

He admitted to himself that Kitty was exceedingly pretty, prettier than most girls that he had known. That she was exceptionally interesting he also conceded to himself. He found her company even more agreeable than that of her brothers, and as time went on he would rather spend half an hour with her in the drawing-room than an hour with the young men at billiards. This in itself was symptomatic, but he attached no importance to it.

This night, however, as he rode slowly homeward, many little circumstances began to appear to him in a new light. He had set out to conquer, and if he was not being conquered himself he was next door to it. He could not deny that Kitty's money was not her only attraction—that in some vague way he cared for her for herself, that he found himself constantly desiring her

company, that it had become his greatest pleasure to ride over to Trevisco and spend an hour in the pleasant drawing-room of the Bolithos, while Kitty sang or played, or he entertained her with stories of his exploits.

Day by day, while he flattered himself that he had been subduing her, she had been subduing him. He looked back upon his declaration of love an hour or so ago, and with many unnecessary oaths swore to himself that it was not altogether simulated. He had a consciousness that he could not have spoken so effectively had he not, to some extent at least, meant what he said.

By the time he had reached Stonehurst he confessed to himself that he was prepared to marry Kitty on the following week even if she had not a fiftieth part of the dowry she was likely to get. During a good portion of the night he lay awake thinking and dreaming of the fair girl he had been making love to, and the more he thought of her the more his passion grew.

“By Cromwell,” he said to himself, “they often say that there is no fool like an old fool, and I am getting to believe that there is truth in it. That that girl has completely bewitched me there is no denying; but isn’t she pretty, though, and so gentle and innocent! Really, I am beginning to think that there may be good women, after all. I wish she was a little less good, upon my soul I do! She might be pretty and interesting, and all

that, without being so absolutely guileless. I'm afraid she'll find me out sooner or later, and then my game will be up. It will be awkward if I break my heart or my neck in the pit that I have digged for her. But, no, no, no! I think I have her safe enough—the little witch is completely fascinated by me. She believes all my heroics, and accepts all my romances as Gospel truth. I must be careful not to contradict myself, however, or she'll find me out. I have been playing a somewhat dangerous game, and if I am not particularly cautious in the future I shall land myself in a trap."

It was far on towards morning when the captain fell asleep, and then he found himself wandering in dreams by the side of Kitty, talking of love and picturing scenes of domestic bliss which they were to enjoy together in after-years. He had a feeling that he had grown quite virtuous and domesticated; that, in fact, his evil nature had been subdued by the sweet woman at his side. He wondered what process of conversion he had passed through, for in his dreams he could hardly recognise himself as the Captain Carew of former days in a far country.

When he got down to breakfast he was restless and ill at ease, and impatient to get away for another conversation with Kitty. He never imagined that he could be so eager for a sight of her face, or that his heart could yearn so much for the music of her voice.

His Indian servant, whom he had rechristened Jacob (a man with the tread of a panther and the strength of a giant, a man too ignorant to be villainous, and too superstitious to be heroic—a queer compound of swarthy humanity, who was redeemed from the utterly commonplace by a blind and unswerving devotion to his master), wondered what had come to his lord that his appetite failed so completely.

During the forenoon the captain wandered through his garden and grounds in the most listless and absent-minded fashion. Jacob watched him furtively, and wondered what new plot he was hatching; for in the old days in India the captain had been prolific in plots, some of which Jacob had carried out at great personal danger to himself.

Davy, the groom, looked on, but said nothing, whilst the old housekeeper concluded that her master's liver was out of order, and that he was preparing for a bilious attack.

These three people, it should be said, constituted the captain's household. Only a few rooms in Stonehurst were occupied; the others were unfurnished, and left to the undisturbed possession of ghosts or rats or anything else that might gain admission to them. The captain was too poor to keep up a large establishment; moreover, he did not like many people about him, and those whom he engaged he was careful to have completely

under his thumb. As a matter of fact, his three servants would do almost anything for him, and would never trouble to ask for a reason why.

Davy was a discharged soldier who had served under him in India—a man as innocent of virtue as a child is of vice. In fact, Davy was as near destitute of moral sense as it is possible for a man to be; yet, on the whole, he was faithful to his master. He believed that he had a good place, and that it was policy to keep it, and so in a dogged, stolid fashion he did his work, and asked no questions. Like Jacob, he knew a great deal about his master, but had sense enough to keep a still tongue.

After lunch the captain sat for half an hour out in the porch in the full glare of the sun, smoking. Jacob brought him coffee, and lighted his cigar for him. But the captain took no notice of his attendant, and Jacob, much wondering, asked at length—

“Is the master not well?”

“Oh yes, I’m well enough, Jacob. Why?”

“The master be very quiet,” Jacob replied. “He be not cheerful; he does not laugh to-day.”

“Oh, get away with you,” the captain replied petulantly, “and don’t trouble your stupid head about me!”

Jacob stole away at once, and when he had got some distance the captain called him back.

"Go and tell Davy," he said, "to saddle the bay mare, and to bring her round in half an hour's time."

"Yes, sir!" answered Jacob, and vanished.

The captain watched the blue smoke wreathing up from his cigar-end in dreamy abstraction. It formed fantastic shapes as it coiled round his head, revealing every now and then the profile of Kitty, smiling sweetly at him for a moment and then vanishing.

"Bother the girl!" he said to himself. "I can't keep her out of my head. I'll get this matter settled as quickly as possible. I think I'm safe enough, but I'll press my suit again this afternoon, and get a definite answer. I might be a youth of eighteen instead of a man of forty-four."

On reaching Trevisco he found that the bird had flown, and that no one was at home save Mrs. Bolitho, and she was taking her afternoon nap. The captain did not want to see Mrs. Bolitho, he said, and was greatly disappointed that all the others were away.

"I expect Miss Kitty will be back directly," the maid answered; "she has been gone some time now."

"I presume she has gone to town?" the captain questioned.

"Oh no; she has only run across to Bewleigh; I saw her walking towards the park."

"Oh, indeed! Then if I go across there I shall possibly see her?"

"That I cannot tell," was the reply; "but if you will come in and wait, I am quite certain she will be back soon."

"I prefer not to be indoors this beautiful weather," said the captain, "so I will take a stroll in the direction of Bewleigh myself." And, raising his hat politely to the maid, he walked away, for the captain was always polite even to servants.

A brisk walk of a quarter of an hour, and the captain came within sight of the stately mansion of Bewleigh, and in a moment a feeling of anger and resentment rose up in his heart. Why should his brother be in such affluence, and dwell in a mansion so beautiful, while he was condemned to poverty and to all manner of shifts to get a living? A few minutes later he came within sight of Roger and Kitty walking side by side across the lawn in the direction of some tall trees, and at sight of them his anger and bitterness increased a hundred-fold.

He had always hated his nephew—had spoken of him to himself as a vile interloper, had regarded him as a stumbling-block in the way to his own wealth and position. If he were only out of the way everything would be clear, and in time he would come into possession of Bewleigh, with its rich acres and large rent-roll, and have a title to boot. Hence to see Roger walking by Kitty's side in animated conversation was as fuel to the fire.

He paused behind a large rhododendron tree, and watched them with a mad feeling of jealousy in his heart as they drew nearer to where he stood. Kitty's sweet, liquid eyes as she looked confidingly at Roger; his low, earnest words in reply, only a murmur of which reached his ears, simply maddened him. He could see by the glance of Roger's eye that he was desperately in love with the girl by his side. Every movement and gesture revealed the same fact, and, as far as he could see, Kitty received his attentions in perfect good faith, as though there was a perfect understanding between them. He called her Kitty, she called him Roger, and there appeared to be no shadow of constraint.

They turned aside at length to the large garden-chair in which we first saw them, and sat down side by side. Kitty took up her needlework and became deeply absorbed, while he bent his eyes upon his book. But the captain was quick to note that every now and then he lifted his eyes to hers. He saw also his lips move, and supposed that he was talking to her; and though he could hear no conversation, he did not doubt that love was the theme, and his heart grew bitter, not only with anger, but with jealousy.

He had not felt so furious for many years. It seemed as though his nephew Roger was to be his rival in everything, and was to rob him of every possession worth having. The only things in the world on which

he ever set his heart were denied him simply because the young man stood in the way.

Was it to be always so? Was he never to possess anything that he desired because that young man lived and crossed his path? And he clenched his fist with savage energy, and muttered curses under his breath.

He tried to get nearer to the young people, so that he might hear their conversation; but this he found to be impossible. He could only look at them from a distance, and grind his teeth in impotent rage and fury. He turned away at length, with an evil light blazing in his eyes, and made his way toward Trevisco.

Half an hour later Kitty followed in his steps. She waited a little while, hoping that Roger would come back to her. But he evidently intended no further word of good-bye.

She did not overtake the captain, however, as she had to go into the village; but so troubled and absent-minded was she that she forgot half her errands.

"I wish Roger had not left me in the way he did," she said to herself, as she walked slowly through the village street. "Poor Roger! I do feel sorry for him!"

Then her face instantly brightened, for she saw him coming towards her, as she thought, and she quickened her pace to meet him. But her face quickly fell again; it was not Roger, after all, but young Dick Lowry, the son of a drunken watchmaker of that name.

She had noticed his likeness to Roger before, but was doubly impressed by it now. He had the same sallow complexion, the same deep-set eyes and prominent nose, the same wealth of dark hair. He was also about the same height and build; indeed, were he differently dressed, he might pass for Roger anywhere.

She smiled and bowed to young Lowry as he passed, and then her thoughts went back again to Roger.

That evening the captain came back to Trevisco again, but Kitty was careful not to allow herself to be alone with him. The captain manoeuvred to the best of his ability, but Kitty was on her guard. Hour after hour he remained, but Kitty was not to be turned from her purpose. It was nearly midnight when he rose to go, and then with evident reluctance.

But before he could reach the hall, his brother Sir George rushed excitedly into the house.

“Have you seen anything of Roger?” he asked, looking anxiously from one to another.

“I saw him this afternoon,” Kitty answered promptly.
“I was with him ever so long.”

“And have you not seen him since?”

“No, I have not.”

“I had hoped perhaps he had called here, and was having a game of billiards with the boys. Oh, dear, I am getting quite anxious about him!”

“Do you mean that he has not been home to dinner?”

Robert Bolitho asked, with an anxious note in his voice.

"He has not been seen, so far as I can make out, since six o'clock this evening, when Miss Dempster caught a glimpse of him walking across the park."

"At any rate, he cannot have got far," broke in the captain. "We must organise a search-party at once."

"I am afraid some terrible accident has happened to him, for it is not like Roger to stay out late," Sir George said dolefully.

And then a moment of painful silence fell, for the same fear was in other hearts.

CHAPTER VI

THE LOST HEIR

HOW the news reached the village that the heir of Bewleigh was missing no one ever knew ; but before the church-clock struck one, half St. Mullion knew, and the search-party had swollen into very considerable dimensions. From inquiries made, it was ascertained that he had been seen in Beaver Wood just as it was growing dusk. Two men returning from their work had met him walking along the river-bank, with bent head and hands locked behind his back, as if he were in deep thought. He lifted his eyes for a moment as he passed, and nodded and smiled, and they hurried homeward and thought no more about it.

Beaver Wood was more than two miles away from Bewleigh, and why he should walk there no one could understand, unless he wanted to visit his uncle at Stonehurst, which was not at all likely ; and, as later inquiries proved, no one had seen him in the neighbourhood.

To Beaver Wood, therefore, the search-party directed

their steps, with sticks and poles and lanterns, and before morning had explored every nook and corner of it; but nothing could be discovered of the missing man. The theory with which they started—that he had hurt himself in some way, broken a leg or sprained an ankle, and so was unable to return home—proved to be entirely at fault. If he were merely hurt, he would cry for help. But the woods were as silent as the grave, save for the noise the searchers made.

As the hours passed away, the faces of the men began to assume a very serious expression. The theory of a sprain or fracture now was not sufficient to explain the disappearance, and men began to ask each other if there had been foul play. Sir George wandered up and down like a man distracted. The captain seemed to be the most alert and active of the band, and left no stone unturned as far as he was concerned to discover the whereabouts of his nephew.

A common trouble seemed to bring the brothers into closer sympathy than they had been before since the captain's return. Sir George appeared to be intensely grateful for his younger brother's solicitude; but the fear in his heart was growing all the while into a dull despair, and before the morning dawned he had almost given up hope of ever seeing his son alive.

With the new day, however, a glimmer of fresh light seemed to be thrown across the mystery. One of the

searchers picked up a narrow slip of paper about the length and width of his forefinger, on which two words were written in pencil : "Kitty, farewell!" Whether these words were in Roger's handwriting or no, no one seemed able to give a positive answer. Sir George looked at the slip of paper long and attentively, then he quietly slipped it into his pocket without remark.

The finder of the paper expressed his opinion to a little group of listeners that it furnished a clue to the mystery.

"In which way?" asked Dick Lowry, the young man who bore such a striking resemblance to Roger. And he shivered visibly as he asked the question.

"Well, in this way." And the speaker assumed an important air, as though he had solved an insoluble problem. "Now, to begin with, who's Kitty?"

"Askin' a second question ain't answering the first," some one interjected.

"Don't be so mighty sharp," was the quick reply. "I says again, who's Kitty?"

"Why, Squire Bolitho's daughter, to be sure. There ain't no other Kitty as he cared two straws for."

"Well, what has that to do with it?" Dick Lowry asked, trying in vain to keep his teeth from chattering. "She was as fond of him as he was of her."

"Don't you be too sure. She liked him in a sisterly way, no doubt. But I puts two an' two together. He

wanted to marry her, and she wouldn't consent ; and 'ere's what the newspapers call the sekal."

"Oh, that's all guesswork of thine," some one said scoffingly.

"Well, then, thee guess a better guess," was the quick retort.

"But you haven't explained yet what the sequel is," Lowry replied.

"The sekal, in thy case, is that thou'l be laid up if thee doesn't go home and go to bed."

"I own I'm a bit shivery," Lowry answered. "But what do you presume has become of the young squire ?"

"Committed suicide," was the short reply, "or else gone out of the country. Those words were his last message to the girl. It's a tragedy, you take my word for it."

This appeared to be the last word on the subject, and the little group broke up to continue the search, all except Lowry, who felt too ill to remain any longer.

Sir George watched his opportunity, and hurried away alone and unobserved in the direction of Trevisco. He must see Kitty and question her. He had little doubt that the pencilled words were in Roger's handwriting ; and if Kitty would consent to be frank and outspoken, she might throw some light on the subject.

He found Kitty looking pale and hollow-eyed. She had not been to bed for the night.

"Have you found him, Sir George?" was her first eager question.

"No, my dear, I am sorry we have not," was his disheartened reply; "but we have found this slip of paper, and I have hurried back to you, wondering if you could throw any light on the matter."

Kitty reached out her hand, with a little gasp, and took the paper from Sir George's fingers. The baronet watched her face intently. But she showed no sign. During the last two days she had developed wonderfully. She was no longer a girl. She was surprised at her reserve of strength.

"Well?" questioned the baronet at length, impatient at Kitty's silence.

"I think it is Roger's handwriting," she answered, without lifting her eyes.

"Yes, I think that myself," he replied; "but—but—I do not understand."

"Nor do I," she answered quietly.

"Then you can throw no light on the subject?" he questioned, in a tone of disappointment.

"I fear I cannot, Sir George—that is, I can throw no light on his disappearance."

"But the paper, my child? Why should he bid you farewell in that way?"

"I don't know; I really don't. It looks as if he were scribbling words in his notebook, words of no

particular meaning ; and then, seeing what he had written, tore up the leaf and threw it away."

" It may be so. But why your name, Kitty, and the word ' farewell ' after it ? People have generally some kind of reason for what they do."

" I don't think they have always, Sir George. We often do one thing while we are thinking about quite another."

" Then there was no reason why he should say good-bye to you ? " Sir George persisted.

" There was nothing worth calling a reason," she answered, a warm blush suffusing her face.

The baronet was quick to note the rising colour and her somewhat evasive answer, and was determined, even at the risk of annoying the girl, to press his questions home.

" Then you had not quarrelled ? " he asked abruptly.

" No, Sir George ; Roger and I never quarrelled," she answered, looking him frankly in the eyes. " We disagreed sometimes ; but we were much too good friends to quarrel."

" And you separated just as usual this afternoon ? "

Kitty blushed and looked annoyed. Then, drawing herself up, she answered—

" No, Sir George, we did not."

" I am sorry to give you pain, Kitty," the baronet

said, with a little shake in his voice; "but you can understand what trouble I am in."

"And I am in great trouble too," she answered impulsively, the tears coming suddenly into her eyes.

"Yes, yes; I know you were very fond of each other; that is the reason I question you so closely. Anything coming between you would prey upon his spirits terribly."

"But he would not do anything rash because we disagreed about anything."

"I should hope not, my dear. No, I think Roger was too healthily constituted to become morbid over anything, though at first he would be a good deal upset. Am I to understand, Kitty, you would not give him any encouragement?"

"How could I, Sir George?" she answered, blushing crimson. "We have been like brother and sister. And then—oh, how could I know? Oh, Sir George, I cannot explain things. I did not want to give him pain, and I was awfully grieved that it seemed to hurt him so. But what could I do? I could not say what was not true, could I?"

"No, my child. It is always best to be truthful. Yes, yes. And my poor boy left you angrily, did he?"

"Oh no; he was not in the least angry. He seemed hurt and not like himself; but I am sure he was not angry."

"And he left you suddenly?"

"Yes. I was very sorry that he left me as he did. I waited some time for him to come back. He frightened me a little."

"Frightened you?"

"Well, he was so terribly serious, you know. I never saw him just in the same mood before."

"And it was in that mood he went away?"

"I could not help it, you know. I hope you do not blame me?"

"Not in the least, my child. I am sorry, of course. I had hoped that some day you and Roger would make it up. You have seemed almost like my own child, and I should have been glad if—if—but it can't be helped now."

"But you don't think this has anything to do with Roger's absence, do you? Oh, I shall never be happy again if any harm has come to him through me."

"Whatever may have happened to him, you are not to blame in any way, my dear. You could not have acted in any other way. I have not given up hope yet. Perhaps he will have turned up at Bewleigh by this. I will hurry home and see." And Sir George's face brightened for a moment, but only for a moment, for he knew if he had reached his home, word would have been sent to Trevisco at once.

Nevertheless Sir George walked with quick step along the field-path and across the park, half hoping that he would see some one coming to meet him bearing welcome news.

But this hope, like many others, ended in disappointment. Never before did the great house seem so empty or so silent as it did that morning.

Outside, the summer sun was shining brightly, and all the dew-laden leaves and flowers gleamed and flashed as though decked with rubies.

But within the blinds were drawn, and all the servants moved about as though some one lay dead in the house, and spoke to each other in whispers, as if afraid of waking some one who was asleep.

Sir George locked himself in his study, and dropped wearily into an easy-chair. It wanted half an hour yet to their usual breakfast hour.

At present he could only wait events with the best patience he could command. The local constables had now got the matter in hand, and there were plenty of volunteer searchers who would do everything that could be done.

For himself, he was almost too weary to think. He had been on the tramp since midnight, without a wink of sleep or a particle of food, with the result that he was almost in a state of collapse.

His grief had settled down into a dull ache. Hope

had practically died out of his heart. If Roger were alive, he would have been found long before this.

In a dull, lethargic way he was trying to prepare himself for the worst. The search would have to be for the dead, not the living. Very likely before the day was out he would see them bringing home his dead body.

Roger dead—and by his own act! The thought would obtrude itself, in spite of everything. In a moment of despair or of mental aberration, caused by disappointed love, he had wandered away to his death.

It seemed clear enough now to the baronet as he sat there in the darkened room—for he had not the courage to pull up the blind and look out over the sunlit garden. Love had bitten Roger deeply; and when Kitty said “No!” to him, it would seem as though everything in life worth living for had gone. Reason would stagger for a minute under the blow, and before he had time to recover himself the fatal act was committed.

It seemed to him clear now as a sunbeam. The pencilled words “Kitty, farewell!” could have but one meaning. He meant to die. True, it was unlike a Carew to play such a cowardly part. But Roger took after his dead mother in many ways. He was bookish and studious, and perhaps much mental effort had unhinged his mind.

His reflections were broken by a loud rap at the door. He rose at once, turned the key, and opened it. His brother Frank stood before him.

"I could not keep away from you, George, in this hour of trial," the captain said, blowing his nose violently.

"It is very good of you to come," the baronet answered brokenly. "You have not found his body yet, I presume?"

"Oh, please, George, don't talk yet about finding his body!" the captain answered briskly. "Let's make sure he is dead first."

"I fear there's no doubt on that score, Frank; we'd better prepare ourselves for the worst."

"I don't think so at all," the captain answered. "I think there may be fifty chances that he is still alive."

"Nay, Frank; I have thought it all out," Sir George answered. "I've seen Kitty Bolitho, and had a long talk with her. He left her yesterday afternoon broken-hearted and in despair. Here is his last hopeless farewell to her." And he held out the bit of paper that had been found in the wood.

The captain's face was a study while Sir George was speaking. It was as though emotions of an entirely different character were contending for the mastery.

"Do you think he proposed to her?" the captain questioned at length.

"She was naturally reticent, as you may suppose, on so delicate a subject," Sir George answered. "But I fear my poor boy was too precipitate. He was always a little impulsive. If he had only waited a little longer—prepared the way, as it were—I believe the result would have been very different. Kitty has always been very fond of him, but never regarded her liking in that light; and because she would not give him a positive answer right off——"

"A positive answer right off?" the captain interrupted. "Then you think she really likes him?"

"I am sure of it. It would have come out all right if he had not been so hasty. Oh, my poor boy!" And Sir George turned away his head and groaned.

"Don't give way so, George," the captain answered sympathetically. "I never give up hope so long as there is any uncertainty in the case. And as for the young lady, she'll give her affirmative answer yet, you mark my words. But there goes the breakfast-gong."

"You'll stay to breakfast, of course?" Sir George said.

"Well, yes, I don't mind if I do."

"For myself, I feel as if I should choke," the baronet said.

"Nevertheless, you must eat," the captain replied. And he opened the door for his brother to pass out.

CHAPTER VII

UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE

THE search was continued throughout the whole of that day, and for many days following ; but the report brought home each evening was always the same. All hope of finding Roger alive after the first day was abandoned by every one. Efforts were now directed towards finding his body.

The general belief was that he had either fallen or thrown himself into the river, in which case his body might never be found, for the Reagle was not an ordinary stream, with a straight course between regular banks. On the contrary, it was irregular and tortuous, widening out here and there into broad bays, narrowing in other places under high and rocky bluffs, curving round unexpectedly into deep and sedgy backwaters, and sinking at the low spring-tides to one-fourth its ordinary dimensions. Hence to drag all the bays and pools and creeks and backwaters of this river was quite impossible. The only thing to do was to keep a sharp look-out on the right bank, to drag a few of its deepest

places, and to stretch a net across one of its narrowest parts, so that a body rising on the water might not float outward to the sea.

Of course a number of adventurous young men went out evening after evening, some with poles, others with boat-hooks, and made as complete a search of the river in all directions as possible ; but for more than a week nothing happened save one pathetic incident, and that had to do with Dick Lowry.

The night spent with the searchers in the wood, breathing the damp, foggy air from the river, proved too much for him. It was very evident long before morning that he had caught a severe chill. He hurried home soon after the dawn, and went to bed, saying nothing to any one ; indeed, his old aunt and his drunken father were fast asleep when he crept into the cottage, and when he did not get up, later in the morning, very little notice was taken of him. His father was always more or less under the influence of liquor, and could not realise that his son was in any sense dangerously ill. He had got a bit of a cold, or perhaps was lazy or sleepy.

While the old man had a sixpence to spend in drink he was quite content, and, searching in his son's pockets, he found enough money to get a day's enjoyment according to his own conception of pleasure, and trotted off directly after breakfast to spend the day in a public-

house. The old woman, however, was not long in discovering that her nephew was seriously ill, and towards evening she sent for Dr. Pascoe; but by the time the doctor arrived double pneumonia held poor Dick with the grip of death. A casual examination convinced the doctor that the young fellow was beyond hope of recovery.

Sitting down by his bedside, he told him as quietly as he could that his chance of life was very little, and that he had better, while he had time, make his peace with God. Dick looked up at him in sheer astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me," he gasped, "that I shall not get better?"

"That is what I fear," the doctor answered.

"You mean by that that I shall die?" the young fellow questioned.

"I do not think you can live many hours," the doctor said slowly and seriously.

For several minutes Dick lay absolutely still, as though trying to grasp the meaning of what he had heard. He had never thought much about death—or, indeed, about anything save how he could best keep his father from drink and a roof over their heads. He had very little ambition, and not much hope of ever doing much in life. He supposed that he would have to struggle through it, as other men did, until he got old, and then quietly die. But that he might die in his

youth, and before his father, was a thought that never occurred to him ; and evidently, when he realised the truth, his first thought was for the old man.

“ What will become of father when I’m gone ? ”

“ I cannot tell,” the doctor answered ; “ but doubtless he will be taken care of.”

“ Taken care of ? Who cares for a drunkard ? ” Dick questioned. “ He has not a friend in the place. Perhaps he does not deserve one. I’ve tried to do my best for him ; but if I’m taken away, they’ll push him into the workhouse.”

“ You must leave your father, as you leave yourself, in the hands of a good God,” the doctor answered.

“ Do you think God cares ? ” Dick questioned. “ I’ve always thought that He concerned Himself only about big folk.”

“ We are all equal in His eyes,” the doctor said seriously ; “ with God there is no great and no little.”

“ If I thought God would look after him when I am gone, I wouldn’t mind, for life ain’t much in itself for such as me.”

“ There’s a better life for those who trust in God and do their duty,” the doctor said.

“ And shall I see the young squire when I get there ? ” Dick questioned, with an eager look in his eyes.

“ If the young squire is dead, then you may meet him again,” the doctor answered.

"I'd like to meet him again and talk to him. I'd like to tell him how much he's done for me."

"Has he been kind to you?" the doctor questioned.

"Not in the usual way, I reckon," Dick answered. "I don't think he knew me; but, you know, every one said we were very much alike, and I were a little proud of that; and because I was like the young squire, I never wanted to do anything, don't you see, that would disgrace my looks. The young squire were of the right sort. Like his father, he was always trying to do some good; and though I never came in his way, yet because I was like him in looks, why, I tried a little bit to be like him in other things. I thought if he had a father like mine, he'd be kind to him, and so I've tried to be kind to my father. It's been a hard task, you may depend. I've lost my temper often and often; but somehow being like the young squire has kept me kind of right, if you understand. I can't explain it any better; but if I meet him up there in the better country, why, I'll tell him how he has helped me."

The old doctor listened with an amused smile upon his face. This was something altogether new in his experience. He had, of course, debated the question of unconscious influence; but never in his long life had he come across anything just like this, and he made a mental note of it. It would be something to talk about in days to come.

"You don't think it was silly of me, because I was like the young squire, to try to be like him in other things?" questioned Dick.

"Nay, nay, nay, my lad; it was very brave of you, and very right. I am quite pleased to hear what you have said."

"And if he's dead, you know, doctor, why, perhaps it's as well I should go too. If I hadn't him to keep me right, why, you see, I might get wrong. I don't think there's very much good in me of myself, and I wouldn't like to fall into the dad's ways, and so, perhaps, it's best I should go."

"If it is God's will that you should be taken, it must be all right, for God makes no mistakes."

"And you think I shall go soon, do you?"

"I fear you will not live until the morning."

"Well, then, would you mind telling some of my mates to come and see me? I'd like just a word with 'em before I'm taken. There's Bob Martin and Sam Sleeman and Bill Williams—tell 'em I'm going to die, and I've just a word to tell 'em before I go."

"I will carry out your wishes gladly; but try not to distress yourself. Be as calm as you can, and we will still hope for the best. You know, while there is life there is hope."

"I'm not going to fret, doctor, or worry," was the answer. "I don't mind much which way 'tis. You say

God is good, and I'm going to trust Him. You say He don't make any mistakes, then I'll leave it all to Him, and if I get better I'll try still to look after dad. If I don't get better—well, then, I must leave him in His hands."

An hour later Dick's companions gathered round his bed, much wondering at the message he had sent to them, not realising yet that he was dangerously ill.

"Why, you don't look bad, Dick," said one of them ; "you'll be as right as a trivet by morning. Keep your heart up, old boy ; never mind what the doctor says."

"I am keeping my heart up," Dick answered, "and I'm not going to fret ; but, you see, if the worst comes to the worst, and I turn up my toes to the turf, why, good may come out of what I'm going to say."

"Oh, if you are going to talk in that way, don't you think you had better see the rector ?" one of them said.

"I'll see him, too, if he'll come and see me," Dick said ; "but I want to talk to you first, and I can't talk much, because my breath is terrible short and stabs me like knives."

"Then why talk at all, Dick ?" Bill Williams asked, looking very white and distressed.

"Well, you see, Bill, it's this way. If I go, why, dad will be left alone in the world, and he isn't able to take care of himself, and I thought I'd like to ask you, in case I'm taken, to give an eye to the old man."

"I reckon he'll go his own way whatever folk may do for him," was the answer.

"I'm afraid he will," Dick said, with a gasp ; "but when he's got to work again for his own living, why, he may be better. You see, he's depended on me, and I've allowed him to do it. When I'm gone he'll have to turn to work again ; and if he's encouraged a bit, and folks give him odd jobs to do, why, it may be the making of him ; and I thought, mates, you might give an eye to him and find him a job now and then."

"We'll do our best for him for your sake, Dick," they answered ; "but we're hoping that the worst ain't going to come to the worst. Cheer up ; perhaps you'll be better in a few days."

So they left him, and a little later his father staggered into the room. Some one had fetched him from the public-house, and told him that his boy Dick was dying. The news seemed to sober him somewhat, for he was far less drunk than might have been expected when he got to the bedside of his lad. He began to weep copiously when Dick reached out his hand and laid it upon his.

"I reckon, father, I'm not going to get better," he said.

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense, Dick ! you're young yet ! You'll be right as ninepence in the morning !"

"The doctor says he reckons I'll be in a better world by the time morning comes."

"Oh, don't you take no notice of the doctor!" the old man answered, tearfully. "They don't know everything. A young chap as can talk like you is a good way from the end."

For a long time there was silence in the room, and the old man sat down and shed tears copiously. He was not so far under the influence of drink but he realised that his son was in grave peril; and as this truth forced its way more clearly into his mind, it seemed to counteract the influence of the alcohol he had taken.

"I've tried to do my best for you, dad," Dick said, after a long pause. "I reckon now I shan't be able to do any more. You'll have to try for yourself when I'm gone, and I hope you'll try your best. The lads have promised to give you a lift now and then, and the doctor says God cares for everybody."

"I reckon, Dick, that God doesn't care for such as me," the old man answered brokenly and tearfully. "I reckon I'm not worth saving. It's a mistake for you to be took and me left."

"No, no, dad; the great God knows best. I've been told that off and on all my life. I haven't taken much notice of it, but it comes to me now that I'm dying, and I believe it's the truth."

"And ain't you afraid, Dick?" the old man questioned, in a tone of surprise.

"Nay, I don't know as there is much to be afraid of. I reckon the other world will be a sight better than this, and one oughtn't to be afraid to go to a better place."

"But—but, Dick!" And then the old man hid his face in his hands and was silent. A broken and disconnected remnant of doctrine and dogma that he had heard in other years floated vaguely across his mind. But he was unable to shape his thoughts into words; nor was he certain that, could he do so, his words would bring any comfort to the young man. Dick waited for him to speak further, and at length he lifted up his bleared eyes and tearful face, and said—

"I wish I felt as safe, Dick, as you do. You seem mighty happy, my lad, for one as is near the end. I don't quite understand it."

"I don't understand it myself, father," Dick answered; "but somehow I just trust in the good God that I've heard about always. And leaving it like that, I don't have any fear. I reckon it's all right if you do your best, dad. Why, we'll meet in the better country!"

After that silence fell, and when Dick spoke again it was clear that his mind was wandering. Now and then, in broken sentences, he seemed to be living the past over again. Now he spoke to the young squire, and told him that he was trying to be like him; now his word was to his father, urging him to give up the drink;

and now he broke out into a low gurgle of laughter, as though something pleased his fancy.

When the doctor called next morning, the old aunt assured him that Dick was a great deal better.

"He has given over talking nonsense," she said, "and is sleeping quietly, and don't seem to be in any pain."

The doctor did not reply, but went at once to the patient's room. He did not stay long, and when he left he made no remark; but he knew only too well that all hope of recovery was past. That evening, just as the sun was sinking into the western skies and shedding its last beams across the wooded uplands, Dick's spirit passed out into the Great Silence.

When the news was whispered throughout St. Mullion that Dick Lowry was dead, it caused something like consternation, for very few people were aware that he was ill, and it seemed a strange and painful fatality that he who had been among the first to go in search of the young squire should lose his life in consequence.

Then people began to talk of his likeness to the missing heir of Bewleigh. The doctor also related his conversation with Dick, and by the following day it was the subject of general comment how the poor young fellow, because he was like the young squire in appearance, tried to be also like him in conduct.

Indeed, it became the subject of many a homily from pulpits in the neighbourhood.

So it happened that Dick's death and burial excited quite an unusual amount of interest in St. Mullion. People followed the coffin in crowds, and wondered when they would walk in a similar procession at the burial of Roger Carew.

As yet no further clue could be obtained of the missing man. That he might be still living was an idea that no one entertained for a moment. If he had been alive he would have been discovered long since. He had taken no money with him or change of raiment, and it was impossible that one so well known in the district could escape to any other part without being traced and discovered.

As the days succeeded one another, people gave up searching the river, and discontinued their wanderings along its banks. Many people gave it as their opinion that the body—supposing that Roger had drowned himself—had been carried out by the tide into the sea, and that the chances were that it would never be recovered.

Some imagined that he might be lying in some deep pool underneath the shady banks in one of its many arms and creeks, and that he might lie there until the morning of the Resurrection. Others, again, said that the chances were that in eight or ten days the body would rise to the surface, and would then be recovered.

So the life of St. Mullion settled down to its normal state. The people of the village had their own living to get, their own work to do, and their own families to maintain, and they could not afford to waste any more time in searching for the dead. Sir George wandered over his house and grounds like a man who was not quite awake. He had built so much upon his son Roger; he was his one hope, his only ambition. He believed that Roger would yet distinguish himself in the world of letters or polities, that he would do credit to the family, and add renown to the name of Carew; and to have all his hopes suddenly cut off in this way was a blow from which he could not easily recover—in fact, many people declared that he would never be the same man again. It was feared by the doctor that the shock would prove too much for his weak heart, but this fear happily proved to be unfounded.

The captain became most attentive and solicitous, and the rupture between the two brothers seemed to be perfectly healed.

Kitty grew pale and hollow-eyed with anxious waiting and expectation. She had a feeling that she was in some way responsible for Roger's disappearance, and could not shake herself free from the oppression that weighed upon her day by day. Even in her sleep she was haunted by fearful dreams, and morning found her unrested and unrefreshed.

The captain saw how matters stood, and acted his part with great skill. So the days passed away; and then the village of St. Mullion was startled by the news that a discovery had been made in the River Reagle which would end all surmises and clear up the mystery that had so long hung over the fate of Roger.

CHAPTER VIII

DUST TO DUST

STRANGELY enough, it was Davy, Captain Carew's coachman, who discovered the body in a little sedgy and shallow backwater that no one had thought of exploring. He ran off at once and gave the alarm to his master, for Stonehurst was not more than a quarter of a mile distant. In a very short time the captain, his faithful Jacob, and a number of others who had been attracted by the coachman's call, were on the spot.

The body was lying in about four feet of water, face downward. The sedge and rushes seemed quite undisturbed near the bank, as though the body had drifted back into this corner from the river. To haul it on to the bank was a matter of very little difficulty, and as soon as the face was upturned to their gaze every one gave a little sigh, partly of regret, partly of relief, for the mystery attending the disappearance of the young squire was now at an end. His fate was no longer a matter of speculation.

The body was considerably decomposed, but the

features were quite recognisable. His gold repeater hunting-watch, which his father had made him a present of on his twenty-first birthday, had stopped at five minutes past nine o'clock, nearly two hours after the men had seen him walking along the bank of the river.

There was nothing to indicate that there had been a struggle or that violence had been used. His purse and keys were in his pocket, his papers and his pocket-book were undisturbed. Had the face been unrecognisable there was the fullest and completest evidence of his identity.

The inquest that followed was a very brief and formal affair. There was little doubt in the minds of any of the jurors that it was a case of suicide while in a state of unsound mind; but for obvious reasons they preferred to bring in an open verdict of "Found drowned."

"He might have just walked into the Reagle in a fit of abstraction," the foreman of the jury explained to his companions; "and seeing he's Sir George's son, we'd better give him the benefit of the doubt."

"I don't see what benefit it can be to him now he's dead," one of them objected.

"Of course, Richard, it can't make any difference to him," the foreman explained; "but we must consider his friends."

"I don't see," Richard replied, "that we've anything to do with his friends. We've to return a verdict according to facts; and it's as clear as a pikestaff as he's drowned hisself."

"It may seem clear to us," the foreman argued; "but we can't prove it. No one saw him throw himself into the river."

"And how do we know that he did not walk in by accident?" some one questioned. "He was a dreamy, absent-minded young chap, people do say."

"Or somebody might have pushed him in," observed a third.

"And with good reason," broke in a fourth. "It's a bad wind, they say, as don't blow good to somebody."

This reason, however, was instantly withdrawn as being not merely irrelevant but suggestive, and might get the speaker into trouble.

Suggestions at this point became rife, and the foreman had difficulty in getting his fellow-jurors back to the question of the verdict they were to return.

Then Richard Cobbedick spoke again.

"It's easy, Mr. Martin," he said, addressing the foreman, "to say as it might have happened this way or that way or t'other way, but in our consciences we, every one on us, believe as he drowned hisself. What is the use, then, of beating about the bush? Let's say so in our verdict, fair and square."

"But don't you see, Richard," said Mr. Martin, "it isn't a question of what we believe, but what we know? Now, we don't know for certain that he drowned himself, but we do know for certain that he was found drowned."

"I don't call 'Found drowned' a verdict at all," Richard protested. "Everybody know'd that afore. What's the use of bringing all of us here to waste our time in finding out nothin' and telling folks what they know'd afore? Any set of boobies could have found a verdict of 'Found drowned.'" And Richard looked from one to the other of his companions with unutterable scorn.

The foreman began to lose his patience.

"I wonder what we should look like," he said, "if we were to return a verdict of suicide, and later evidence should prove that foul play had been used?"

"As if we hadn't got all the evidence already!" Richard snorted.

"Cobbledick ought to be a judge," some one broke in. "He's much too learned to be a common juryman."

Richard fired up in a moment, and began to bare his wrists. But at this moment the coroner's clerk appeared, and wanted to know if they could give the coroner any idea of the time they would yet be in coming to a verdict.

This had a mollifying effect on Richard, and after a further protest he agreed to the open verdict.

Sir George received his dead with a sense of relief. He knew the worst now, and that was far better than the horrible suspense and uncertainty that had been weighing upon his spirits for so many days.

How Roger had come by his death would, of course, always remain a mystery. That he had committed suicide, which seemed clear enough to him at first, he soon dismissed from his mind. Studious and bookish he doubtless was, but there had never been anything morbid about him.

That he would feel, and feel very acutely, Kitty's inability to love him as he loved her there could be no doubt, but no one who knew Roger intimately could imagine for a moment that he would put an end to his life because of her refusal.

Sir George's latest theory was that after leaving Kitty he went for a long walk, merely to recover tone; that, knowing he had a battle to fight, he was resolved to fight it alone, in the solitude of the woods—he was not given to taking people into his confidence or sharing his burdens with others. He was no coward or weakling, nor did people ever hear him complain if he could not get his own way. It was not likely, therefore, that he would put an end to his own life.

Most likely he had climbed to the top of some wooded bluff overhanging the river—perhaps for the view, perhaps for the fresher breeze, perhaps to look at a

bird's nest; or perhaps it had grown dark, and he had missed his way.

He might have gone a step too far in the uncertain light, or the ground might have broken away under his feet, or he might have reached out after something and over-balanced himself. Neither supposition was unreasonable, and no doubt one of them was the true explanation.

Sir George bore his loss with wonderful fortitude and resignation. In this he was greatly sustained by his simple and unwavering faith in the wisdom and goodness of Providence. He was not one of the race of doubters or questioners. He held fast to the simple creed of his childhood without wavering.

There might be a thousand questions he could not answer, a thousand mysteries he could not solve. He accepted the position as inevitable; if he knew everything, he would be a God himself.

But since he was only a man—a creature of a day, hedged in on every side by impenetrable walls of darkness—why should he complain or doubt because he could not see and understand everything? His belief was that God made no mistakes, that a wise order ran through all the mystery of His providence, and that some day, in the clearer light of heaven, all that puzzled him would be made plain.

Why God had taken his son he did not know, nor

was it his to ask the reason. It was his to bow his head in submission, and say, "Not my will, but Thine, be done."

It might be hard; and more than once his heart rebelled, but strength came to him little by little, and before the day of the funeral he appeared to be perfectly resigned.

He was resolved as far as possible to have no fuss or show. His son should be buried simply, and without ostentation. He could not, however, keep away the crowd. They came into St. Mullion from all the country-side—such an imposing procession was never seen at a funeral before.

The captain and Sir George stood side by side at the open grave, but the captain appeared to be much the more deeply moved of the two.

Many people heard very little of the Burial Service, so interested were they in the two men. It was not often that the chance was given of seeing the two brothers side by side, and it was only on such occasions that people realised how great was the contrast between them.

The captain excited the larger amount of interest. To many of the onlookers he was a stranger, yet he was a man to attract attention anywhere—tall, erect, well-built, handsome; while at the present time his marked manifestations of grief made him a peculiarly noticeable figure. Sir George looked comparatively

insignificant by his side. His bent figure and grey hair and deeply-lined pathetic face all seemed accentuated by the side of the younger man.

That Frank was the more striking personality of the two there could be no doubt, whilst his handsome face and figure would win a momentary admiration anywhere. But that was all. His half-closed, restless eyes, his thin, cruel lips, his strong, prominent chin, were not such as to beget affection or confidence. People might fear him, even admire him, but they would think twice before they trusted him.

Sir George, on the contrary, won people's confidence directly. His eyes were so gentle, his smile so sweet, his expression so full of kindly feeling and generosity, that the hearts of all the villagers went out to him unconsciously.

He stood almost unmoved at the graveside, with a wistful, far-away look in his eyes, as though his thoughts were miles distant from the little scene that was being enacted near him. He saw without seeing, heard without hearing. The open vault, the crowd of people, the solemn voice of the rector rising and falling in dreamy monotony, the stifled sob here and there, seemed but parts of a show without meaning or reality. And when at length, leaning on Frank's arm, he turned and walked slowly away, he seemed hardly certain whether he was awake or dreaming.

The villagers watched him through tear-dimmed eyes. The whole scene was so pathetic that they could not help weeping, try as they would. They could not forget that Roger was an only child ; that all the father's hopes had been centred in the lad. The middle-aged people thought of their own children, and mothers with babies in their arms hugged them more closely to their hearts.

The villagers remained in the churchyard long after Sir George and the captain had left, and broke up into little knots and discussed the weather and the crops, and hoped there would be no more funerals of young men in St. Mullion for a bit.

Old Dick Lowry walked slowly into the churchyard long after the principal mourners had left, and, after many twists and turns, came up to the open vault. People stood aside for him, and looked at him wonderingly. They pitied him too. He also had lost a son—a son perhaps as dear to him as the young squire was to Sir George ; a son on whom he had depended for his daily bread, and particularly for his daily drink.

The old man seemed pleased that people took notice of him. In his judgment, it was just what they ought to do. Since the tragic death of his son he felt himself a person of importance in St. Mullion. In some vague, far-off way he was connected with the Hall and the squire and the gentry generally.

There was a suggestion of swagger in his unsteady gait as he came up to the grave, and for several minutes he stood leering with beery eyes at the open vault.

No one seemed disposed to speak to him, and he appeared not to see any one. He took a dirty handkerchief from his pocket at length, and applied it to his eyes. Tears lay very near the surface with Lowry, especially when he was in drink. The application of the handkerchief seemed to touch the fountain of his emotions, and tears at length began to flow very copiously. For a while he swayed himself to and fro. Then he suddenly dried his eyes, stepped back a pace or so, and, with a dramatic wave of the hand, exclaimed—

“The rich sleep in mausoleums of stone, the poor lie snugly in the arms of Mother Earth.”

This was a remark that no one felt quite equal to replying to, consequently a somewhat embarrassing silence followed. Lowry shed a few more tears, in order to bridge over the interval; then, with another dramatic wave of the hand, he said—

“I thank you, neighbours, for your unspoken sympathy.”

“You’re quite welcome, Dick,” some one remarked.

Lowry leered across to the speaker and bowed his head; then, with another wave of the hand, he endeavoured to make a beeline for the churchyard gate.

So ended, to all appearances, this little human drama. There was nothing more to be said or done. To-morrow the life of St. Mullion would fall back into its normal condition, the world would roll on as before.

"It's been a nine-days' wonder," said Peter Mudge, the grocer, as he paused, with a shutter in his hand, to speak to his neighbour Richard Cobbledick, who kept a small shoe-shop next door, and who was also putting up the shutters for the night.

"Ay, I s'pose it have," Richard answered regretfully, "though, as I've told 'ee before, Peter, I wasn't at all pleased with the verdict."

"That can't make no difference now," Peter answered lugubriously; "we've seen the end."

"Ay, that's true enough, Peter, we've seen the end." And Richard pushed the shutter home with a little jerk.

And yet how little they knew! How little any one knew! What they supposed was the end was little more than the beginning. They imagined that they had seen the curtain fall for the last time, and that all the lights were out. But, in truth, the curtain had fallen on the first act only. Other acts were to follow, of which none of the audience dreamed.

CHAPTER IX

A SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE

CAPTAIN CAREW drew up his blind the morning after the funeral with a smile of satisfaction upon his face.

"Frank, my boy," he said to himself, "your lucky star is following you still. Nothing could have happened more opportunely, and, blow me, though I shall be independent of that little witch's fortune, I think I'll marry her notwithstanding. Yes, I think I will. She's awfully pretty and sweet, and, scapegrace as I have been, I do believe I'm honestly in love with her. Yes, yes; I shall settle down now as a quiet, respectable squire, and go to church and visit bazaars, and all that sort of thing. Well, well!" And he stroked his chin complacently, and looked out over the pleasant landscape that stretched away in front of him.

It was a lovely prospect on which his eyes rested. More wood than pasture-land, it was true, but it was not less fair on that account. Beyond the crest of the hill he could see the sea in winter, but the foliage was

too dense at present. Down in the valley yonder the Reagle wound in and out. One of its creeks came close up to his kitchen-garden, while its backwaters gleamed between the trees in a dozen different places; and here and there was a bay that looked like an inland lake. How beautiful the whole landscape appeared in the morning light!

The captain took a long time to dress that morning. He seemed to lose himself in day-dreams. And once he dropped into an easy-chair and rested his chin upon his hands.

"Yes," he reflected, "everything is working well; but I shall have to go up to London to-morrow and see if I cannot arrange a loan—that sweepstake I won a fortnight ago is all gone. Lucky sweepstake for me! If I hadn't that ready cash at the time, I couldn't have done what I did. I look upon that as a good investment. But I'm short of cash again, and must get some more. Of course, to raise money on the reversion of Bewleigh will not be difficult. I shall keep out of the way of money-lenders this time. Any first-rate office will entertain the proposal. Let me see, Bewleigh is worth—why, a hundred thousand at the very least, so I shall be able to arrange a loan of a few thousands to be going on with without difficulty." And he rubbed his chin and smiled complacently.

After a while he got up and finished his toilet, and

then descended to breakfast. He did not remain long at the table, however. Jacob waited on him as usual, but evidently he was in no mood for conversation. During the last few days Jacob had been exceedingly silent and even ill at ease. "Perhaps he has something on his conscience," the captain reflected. And he smiled sardonically.

After breakfast he took a stroll round the grounds, and for a while felt disposed to admire Stonehurst. Looking at it from a distance, it was without doubt a picturesque old pile. Part of it was in ruins and overgrown with ivy. A little distance from the main building stood a Norman tower, strongly built, and in a splendid state of preservation. Beneath the ivied ruin was a crypt, much of it still in good repair—at least, so he was told; he had never taken the trouble to explore the subterranean part of the old place himself. On the western side were the remains of some old cloisters, with the gable end standing of what was originally the abbey.

The house part had clearly belonged to a later period. Some of the stones of the abbey had been used in building the present mansion. Why the previous owners had tacked on a dwelling-house to the old ruin he could not imagine. He admitted that the place, as a picture, was pretty enough; but to live, like an owl, amongst ruins was not his ideal of life.

Had he been an antiquarian or a hermit, or had he been given to a study of the sciences, the place would have been right enough ; but he was a soldier, and he loved life and men. He was always happiest where something was going on. He would have lived in the West End of London if he could have afforded it ; to vegetate in a tumbledown place like Stonehurst was little better than purgatory.

" Ah, ah ! " he reflected ; " when I come into possession of Bewleigh I will have a town house. It's all right enough to spend a few months in the hunting season or in the summer in the country ; but give me the city, with its life and colour and movement. Yes, yes ; I shall only begin to live when George is out of the way, and that he can't last long is a dead certainty. He has a weak heart, as every one knows. I quite expected that this shock would have finished him. However, fortune has favoured me so far, and I'm not going to despair about the future."

After lunch he had his horse brought round, and rode across to Bewleigh to see his brother, and finished up the day by calling at Trevisco. He found Kitty looking pale and sad-eyed, but exceedingly sweet and pretty withal. Indeed, he thought he had never seen her look so pretty as that evening.

He said nothing, of course, of love to her ; he was too wise for that. He spoke affectionately of his

nephew, and still manifested considerable grief at his untimely fate. He saw that it pleased Kitty when he spoke well of Roger. They had been companions, he knew, from childhood, and so he deemed it policy to humour her. Now that Roger was out of the way he could extol him with good grace, and not be afraid of any evil consequences resulting therefrom.

On the following day he journeyed to London ; and having engaged rooms at a fashionable West End hotel, sauntered out into the city to spend the evening. The following morning he presented himself at the office of a society that he had been told did a considerable business in the purchase of reversions. After some formalities he was shown into the private office of the secretary, where he dropped into a chair with considerable pomposity and began to pull off his gloves. The secretary looked at him narrowly. He had often seen impecunious aristocrats, and knew pretty well what to expect. The captain endeavoured to overawe him, but the secretary knew his business too well to be in the least disconcerted.

"I am Captain Carew," he explained, "of the 63rd Bengal Lancers."

"Indeed," was the reply.

"And I am the only brother of Sir George Carew, of Bewleigh."

"Yes," the secretary answered laconically.

“Sir George had an only son, Roger, who, unfortunately, about a week ago or a little more, accidentally fell into the River Reagle, as you may have read in the papers, and was drowned. The death of this young man constitutes me heir to the estate on the death of my brother George. As a younger son, you will understand, I am not as rich as my brother; indeed, at the present time I am confoundedly poor, and I am anxious to raise a loan on the reversion of the Bewleigh estates. That, in plain English, is the object of my visit this morning.”

“I understand,” said the clerk, “that the Bewleigh estates are strictly entailed.”

“Strictly so,” was the reply.

“Your brother, Sir George Carew, cannot possibly will the property to any one?”

“He has no power to will it at all; it must descend to the next-of-kin.”

“And his only child, you say, is dead?”

“He was buried the day before yesterday.”

“And you are his only surviving brother?”

“He has never had a brother but me.”

“Then your brother, Sir George Carew, though older than yourself, will be a comparatively young man?”

“On the contrary, my brother is twenty years older than myself, and is consequently getting on in life. He looks much older than he really is, having suffered

from heart affection for a considerable time. Indeed, his life hangs upon a thread, and he may drop off at any moment."

"Is his wife much younger than himself?"

"He is a widower. His wife died several years ago."

"Oh, indeed! That alters the complexion of the whole affair. Your brother may possibly marry again."

The captain started from his chair as though he had been shot. It was a thought that had never crossed his mind. Placing his hand to his forehead, he thought for a moment and then sat down again.

"No, no!" he said; "that is quite impossible. My brother will never marry again; he is too devoted to the memory of his deceased wife. Moreover, he is so delicate and so far advanced in life that the idea will never occur to him."

"My dear sir," answered the secretary, "this is a matter on which no man can speak for another. The most unlikely people often marry again. The question of age makes no difference. Indeed, the older men are the more disposed they seem to enter into matrimonial alliances."

"But you do not know my brother!" protested the captain. "If you knew him, you would not speak as you do."

"At any rate, it is a risk that we cannot undertake," said the secretary. "We have to reckon all

contingencies, and to advance money on an estate that may never be yours would be, as you see, bad business."

"But it will be mine!" thundered the captain.

"You hope so, and doubtless think so, and of course, for your sake, I may say that I trust your hopes may be realised; but you must admit that there is an element of risk in the case. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that your brother may take it into his head to marry again. I presume he has a housekeeper at present?"

"He has."

"A young woman, very likely?"

"Well, she is not very old, certainly—thirty, perhaps, or a little more."

"Well, your brother, in his trouble and loneliness, may need some one to comfort him, and may take it into his head to marry his housekeeper; there is no knowing."

"My dear sir, you don't know what you are talking about," roared the captain. "My brother George marry a housekeeper!—a Carew wed an uneducated woman! Impossible! Do you mean to insult me?"

"Nothing of the kind," said the secretary. "It is a mere matter of business we are talking about. You desire a loan on the reversion of certain estates. I see clearly enough that the estates may never be yours."

The captain sat for a moment or two in silence, then rose to his feet, and with his most military air bowed himself out of the office.

His experience that day was most disappointing and annoying—at every place he was met with the same questions, and, grow as eloquent as he might, he was unable to convince the stupid secretaries that they would run no risk. He informed all and sundry that it was quite out of the question that his brother George would ever marry again, but they only smiled superciliously at his warmth and vehemence, and assured him that it was not business, and that they could not undertake the risk.

So after spending two or three days in a vain endeavour to get any respectable office to advance a considerable sum on the reversion of Bewleigh, he had to fall back on the tender mercies of a Jewish money-lender, who was prepared to take the risk, but on his own terms.

As the captain was in dire need of ready cash, he was obliged to accept the terms the money-lender offered. He admitted that the interest was ruinous, and conceded to himself, when he thought the matter over, that with interest and compound interest the loan would soon swallow up an estate even of the dimensions of Bewleigh. Still, there was no help for it, and he was not without hope that his lucky star

would follow him still, and that the exercise of his wits would bring him safely through the difficulty.

The captain, however, did not return to Stonehurst when he had secured his loan. Being in London, he decided that he would remain a few days and enjoy himself. It was always a pleasure to be in London, especially if he had a fair amount of cash in his pocket. He enjoyed, as he often said, its life, its movement and colour. Moreover, there were many people whom he knew, and some whom he had met in earlier days beneath the sun of India. So the days passed away rapidly and grew into weeks.

He thought it better not to obtrude himself too much on Kitty Bolitho just at present; indeed, he felt sure that he would stand all the better chance for keeping out of her way for a time; absence would make her heart grow fonder, and she would begin after a while, especially as she had no longer Roger to fall back upon, to pine for his presence and companionship. So he deemed it good policy to remain away from Trevisco, and as this would be a very difficult task for him if he were lying at Stonehurst, he concluded that he was doing the right thing by remaining in London.

When he had been in town a month, he discovered that he would have to negotiate a second loan unless he soon returned to his own home. Living at the

West End was distinctly expensive, and somehow money ran away at a rate that quite alarmed him. Moreover, on other grounds, he felt that he had been away long enough. So he packed his portmanteaux and took his departure.

He had heard nothing from Stonehurst during his absence, but that did not trouble him ; he had sufficient confidence in his servants to believe that everything would go on all right whether he was present or absent. He had both Jacob and Davy completely under his thumb, and knew, or thought he knew, that they would not be likely to do anything of which he would disapprove.

Great was his surprise, therefore, when, on reaching Stonehurst, he discovered that his faithful Indian had taken his departure. Davy professed entire ignorance as to his whereabouts. He had been seen in the evening, and the old housekeeper declared that he had gone to bed at the usual time—in fact, rather earlier than usual—but when morning came he was absent. His room was searched, and, with the exception of his wardrobe being in a state of disorder, everything appeared in its usual condition.

“Then he must have gone away in the middle of the night !” roared the captain.

The housekeeper did not know what time he went away, and, being very deaf, she heard no sound during

the night, so that he might have gone off before midnight, as far as she knew, or he might have taken his departure in the early hours of the morning.

"Had you or Davy been quarrelling with him?" demanded the captain.

"Oh, nothing of the sort," the old woman said. "We were the best of friends."

"And you say he disappeared two or three days after I left?"

"Yes, sir, he did."

"And you never informed me of the fact?"

"How could we, sir?" said the old woman, adjusting her ear-trumpet; "we didn't know where you was."

The captain swore a great oath, and went off to interview Davy; but nothing could be got out of that individual. Davy appeared to be not only sublimely ignorant, but to be sublimely indifferent about the whole affair. Indeed, he professed not to be sorry that the soft-pated savage had taken his departure. He had no liking for Indians, so he said, and would rather have their room than their company.

The captain swore roundly at his groom, but Davy was not disconcerted thereby. So much troubled was the captain that he did not go that day to see Kitty; indeed, he wandered up and down his dining-room in a state of considerable mental unrest. It was not merely the loss of an invaluable servant that troubled him;

his fear was that Jacob's going away in the way he did boded mischief.

In times past Jacob had undertaken tasks for him of a very difficult and delicate character ; indeed, he had to admit that his good luck was largely owing to the strength and skill and agility of his faithful Oriental. That Jacob was afraid of him he knew ; fear, he considered, was always a good weapon to hold over the head of a servant. He knew also that Jacob was ignorant, though not brutal ; that he was superstitious, but not exactly cunning ; he was faithful and devoted—or had been up to the present—but not from any moral sense of obligation.

It is true that of late he had once or twice asked questions, which the captain did not deem to be a good sign. A servant who asked no questions, but simply did what he was told, was the ideal servant, from the captain's point of view.

But why had he gone away in this surreptitious manner ? There must be a reason for it. The captain admitted to himself that there might be several reasons, but the consideration of those reasons brought him no satisfaction ; indeed, they seemed to increase his uneasiness and unrest.

For several days the captain walked about his grounds in a state of considerable fear and apprehension ; he appeared to be always on the alert, as if expecting that

at any moment he might be confronted by some unpleasant spectre or some unlooked-for event. Even when he visited Trevisco his uneasiness was apparent.

He told Kitty, with tears in his eyes, that he had not yet got over the shock caused by the untimely death of his nephew, that the sorrow hung like a cloud over his heart, and for a while darkened the world.

Kitty was touched very sensibly by the captain's reverence for the memory of his nephew—indeed, nothing pleased him better apparently than extolling the virtues of the deceased; and so well did he simulate grief and affection, that Kitty had no suspicion whatever that he was not perfectly sincere.

Sir George forgot his ancient disagreement, and readily took his brother to his heart. Indeed, so touched was he by Frank's devotion to the memory of Roger, that he made him a present of Roger's yearly allowance. It was not a large amount, truly, but the captain was very thankful for it, and went away blessing his lucky star.

So the days passed on, and grew into weeks, and the captain got over his apprehensiveness, and decided that he might safely fling his fears to the wind, especially as Kitty appeared to receive his attentions with a considerable amount of pleasure, and showed in many little ways that no one was more welcome at Trevisco than he.

CHAPTER X

UNFORGETTING LOVE

SOME people tell us that it is not in the nature of the young to sorrow deeply or to mourn the loss of friends for any length of time. If this be true, Kitty Bolitho must be regarded as an exception to the rule. Not even did Sir George mourn the loss of Roger with keener sorrow than did Kitty, and not more slowly did time apply its salve; indeed, Sir George appeared to recover from the shock the more quickly of the two.

At first Kitty was too stunned to feel acutely. She was quite unable to realise what had happened. It seemed like some dull, oppressive nightmare, from which she struggled in vain to free herself.

It was not till after the funeral that she began to realise all that had happened. The captain had gone away to London. Sir George rarely showed himself at Bewleigh. Roger was absent—her old playfellow and comrade had vanished suddenly from her sight, and she was left alone.

As the days passed away, she began to realise, with

an acute and awful poignancy, that Roger would come back to her no more—that she would never see his face again, never again hear his voice, deep and tender and full of music. At times it seemed too terrible to believe, and she would look round her in dumb, hopeless agony, as though to make certain that she was wide awake.

She only began to realise now how much Roger had been to her. She found herself constantly dwelling in thought upon his goodness. He was not heroic—at least, in any showy, obtrusive sense—he was not brilliant in conversation or handsome in appearance. There was nothing about him to captivate the imagination suddenly. He was not the kind of man that women bow down to and worship.

And yet he had a thousand excellences that only those who were brought into constant contact with him knew. She had never tried to estimate his worth when he was with her. His solid virtues she took for granted, and made no attempt to weigh them up. He was just Roger, the best comrade in the world; but beyond that she never attempted to go, even in thought.

She felt now keenly and sadly enough that she had never appreciated him as she ought to have done. She recognised also that he had been more to her than she knew—that he was so completely a part of her life

that, now when he was taken away, she was like a maimed creature; her power to live and do and enjoy was only a part of what it once was.

After about a week she took to rambling along the old familiar walks and loitering in sunshiny places that seemed almost sacred to her now. Sometimes she would start, as though she heard his footsteps, and look eagerly, as though expecting him to turn the corner. They had been so much together as girl and boy, that the force of association brought his face before her constantly. There was no spot in the wide park, the extensive gardens, and the dim, cool plantation that was not suggestive of his presence, and it seemed to her now as if his spirit brooded everywhere.

Every morning she awoke with a vague sense of loss and desolation, and sometimes she would wonder for a while what had happened. Then in a moment, like a cold wave, the bitter memory would sweep over her heart.

That these experiences should lead to introspection and self-examination was natural enough. If she could live over that afternoon again when Roger confessed his love, would she give him the same answer? She was not quite sure, but she did not think she would.

She wondered now that she had not guessed his growing love for her. She had been strangely blind. She could call to mind a hundred little things now the

significance of which was quite clear. In the fuller light that had come to her—and come, alas! too late—numberless words and acts were eloquent of his love. Why had she never thought of these things before? And why had she never taken the trouble to probe the depths of her own heart?

Now that the captain was out of the way, and distance dimmed the splendour of his achievements, Roger's merits came more and more into view, and her own liking for him seemed to reveal itself in a new light. She had cared for him all along far more than she knew. It was not a mere sisterly affection that she had cherished for him.

If any other woman had come along and stolen him from her, how jealous and chagrined she would have been!

So, little by little the truth revealed itself to her, but the revelation brought no comfort—it but increased the sense of pain and regret. If she had given Roger a word of hope, he would not have left her as he did. And if he had not left her then, he might not have come to such an untimely end. This was one of the bitterest drops in the cup she had to drink.

During all this time she had thought very little about the captain. That exquisite was like a powerful magnet, drawing mightily when he was near, but when removed a sufficient distance, failed to attract at all.

Now and then she wondered what the power was that the captain exercised over her. Before Roger died she believed that she was in love with him, but she was not so sure of it now. She admired him immensely. His recitals of daring and heroism fascinated her; his handsome appearance captivated her fancy. But was there any feeling in her heart beyond a species of hero-worship? And had not gratified vanity something to do with the thrill of ecstasy she had felt?

These thoughts troubled her very considerably, and now and then she wished that the captain would return from London, so that she might be enabled to arrive at the true state of her heart and feelings. Moreover, as the days lengthened into weeks, a sense of loneliness stole over her. She wanted something or some one to break the dull monotony of life. The captain, whatever else he might be, was splendid company. The evenings passed like a dream when he was at Trevisco. Why did he stay so long in London? Had he forgotten her?

So it came about that when the captain returned from town, Kitty received him with every show of pleasure. She was too genuinely a child of Nature, too honestly transparent, to attempt to disguise her feelings. She was glad to see the captain back, and she told him so, and laughingly chaffed him for being away so long.

"Ah, Miss Kitty," he said, with mock emotion, "I

felt that I could not get over my grief unless I kept away for a while. Everything about the whole district so reminded me of him who is no more. Besides, I was so sincerely and genuinely fond of the lad that the only thing for me to do was to get away, and keep away until I had recovered my normal tone."

"I wish I could go away," Kitty answered. "I miss Roger everywhere. I never knew how much I—I valued him until he was taken."

"I can quite understand it," the captain said sympathetically. "It is a mercy for us that Time is a great healer."

"I don't know," Kitty answered, with a far-away look in her eyes. "I seem to want Roger more and more, and every day seems to make the sense of loss more keen and bitter."

"Ah, Miss Kitty, you have been brooding during my absence."

"Perhaps I have, captain. I have ~~been~~ alone a good deal. Father and the boys are away generally from morning till evening, and I am thrown on to myself, as it were."

"I have often thought of you," the captain murmured tenderly, "and wished that I could come to you; but I was so cut up myself that I knew I should only make you more miserable."

Kitty's eyes grew moist as she looked up at him.

It was very beautiful to find that this brave and bloodstained hero was so human in his sympathies and affections.

"I did not think you would have felt it so much, captain. To a soldier death must seem a very little thing."

"Ah, Miss Kitty, when it comes to our own blood relations, to those whom we love, then the loss of one is more than the destruction of an army."

"But you have seen very little of Roger, comparatively speaking——"

"Ah, Miss Kitty," he interrupted, "when the object is worthy, love grows quickly. It is not necessary that we should know people all our lifetime in order to love them."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," she answered with downcast eye. "And then, Roger was very noble."

"I was not thinking of Roger at the moment," the captain answered tremulously, "though what you say of him is quite true. I was thinking of another, whom but to see is to love."

Kitty looked up at him with a startled expression in her eyes, but she did not answer; no suitable reply would come to her.

"I would be silent if I could," the captain went on, in tones of deep emotion, "but the greatness of my love will not let me. It breaks down every barrier, and

sweeps me before it like a torrent. I would rather die than give you pain, and yet I cannot keep my lips shut when you are near. Oh, Kitty, I love you—I love you!"

The captain would have sunk on his knees at Kitty's feet, but she would not let him. She drew herself up very proudly and firmly.

"Please, captain, for my sake," she said, "do not allude to the matter further now. I feel very honoured by what you have said, but we have only just begun to know each other. Besides, recent events have so troubled me that I want time to recover myself."

"Pardon me, Miss Kitty," he said humbly; "I will wait any length of time you may wish. Anything, so long as you do not drive me from your presence altogether."

"You will always be welcome at Trevisco," she answered. "And from no one will you receive a heartier welcome than from me."

"Oh, Miss Kitty, how good of you to say so!" he muttered. "I shall live in hope of that day of all days when a whispered word from you will make me the happiest man on earth, and turn earth into heaven."

"I ought not to listen to you while you talk in that way," she said, trying to assume her coldest manner.

"I beg a thousand pardons. Though my heart break, I will be silent for many days. Now, you will forgive me, will you not?"

She held out her hand to him after a while, in token of assent. He seized it instantly and raised it to his lips; then, turning quickly round, he walked slowly and dejectedly away.

His dejection, however, was only in appearance, and not in reality. As a matter of fact, he was in great good-humour with himself and every one else.

He felt that the battle was as good as won. He prided himself on his knowledge of womenkind, and concluded that it was merely a matter of days, and Kitty would fall into his arms. He admitted that Kitty belonged to a higher type than those he had usually associated with, but that she should be essentially different he could not believe. Cynic that he was, he believed that the same ruling passion ran through all the sex. Coquetry and conquest were dear to their hearts. They loved to dangle the fly at the end of their line, and lead the panting fish a weary chase before letting him swallow the bait.

"It's just their little way," the captain said to himself, as he rode slowly home in the moonlight, "just their little way. They follow their instincts, as all other creatures do. But Kitty is more transparent and ingenuous than most; but she is gravitating towards

me with as much certainty as Newton's apple fell to the earth."

Kitty, however, was disposed to take a somewhat different view of the situation. The captain's second declaration had failed to move her as the first had done. That thrill of delight, so new and sweet and strange, that swept over her heart like a strain of music when he first spoke of love to her, was absent now. And somehow—she could not help the feeling—his entire appeal struck her as being forced and unreal and stagey.

She never felt that when Roger spoke to her. Poor Roger! She was only beginning to see him as he had really been. Too late her eyes had been opened to his worth and love!

Meanwhile, the life of St. Mullion had fallen back into its quiet humdrum ways. The matter that excited most comment was the ability of old Lowry to pay his way and indulge in unlimited libations, and yet do no work.

But it became very clear that the old man had means of which the son knew nothing. Dick was buried quite respectably, and all the expenses paid at once.

There seemed to be an inexhaustible fund somewhere, and the St. Mullion people could not understand it.

Nothing more was heard of Jacob, the captain's Indian servant; but that was a matter that did not

trouble the St. Mullionites in the least, though it troubled the captain a great deal. He kept hoping that he would hear news of him from some quarter, but in that he was disappointed.

So summer merged into autumn, and autumn into winter, and in due course spring blew her breath upon the land again, and then Death came and took toll once more.

CHAPTER XI

AN AWAKENED CONSCIENCE

WITHIN a year from the time our story opens Captain Carew was squire of Bewleigh, possessor of the rich acres he so long had coveted, and tenant of the great hall of his ancestors. He was, moreover, Sir Francis Carew, and a candidate for Parliamentary honours.

He had not, however, realised all his ambition, for Kitty Bolitho had not fallen into his arms, and, indeed, she seemed farther away from him than ever. This to the captain—as we shall continue to call him—was a source of considerable chagrin and humiliation.

It is true that he no longer needed her money, though he would not have objected to that, for money-lenders' interest had a wonderful knack of accumulating, and he was not long in discovering that even the rent-roll of Bewleigh was not sufficient for his requirements.

But though he was comparatively independent of Kitty's money, he did most ardently desire Kitty.

And such is the perversity of human nature—especially such human nature as had been entrusted to him—that the more distant Kitty was with him, the more passionately he desired to possess her.

He did not attempt to deny to himself now that he was desperately in love with her. Her beauty had developed wonderfully during the past twelve months, while her manners were even more charming than before. It is true he had thought little of this while he believed he had her “on toast,” to use his own expression; but now that she had forbidden him to talk love to her under any circumstances, all her qualities seemed to stand out a thousand times more prominently than they had ever done before.

But the wound in his heart, painful as it was, was in reality not the hardest part he had to bear. His wounded pride and vanity gave him the most concern. To think that he, a Carew, should propose to a Bolitho and be rejected!—for it really amounted to that. It is true Kitty had not point-blank declined his proposal, but she had done what was nearly as bad, and he saw, moreover, that his influence over her was a steadily diminishing quantity.

Also—and this, perhaps, was the most humiliating part of all—it had somehow got wind in the neighbourhood that he had offered to make Kitty Bolitho mistress of Bewleigh, and she had declined the honour.

The captain stormed and raved when he was by himself, and swore polyglot oaths, and vowed that he would never darken the doors of Trevisco again. But his words were stronger than his resolutions; and when he had not seen Kitty for three or four days, he literally pined for a sight of her face.

With grim honesty he confessed to himself that the pit he had digged for Kitty he had fallen into himself, and that while his influence over her steadily declined, her power over him increased day by day.

He found also that living in the big house at Bewleigh was not a whit more comfortable than living alone at Stonehurst. He was just as lonely and just as miserable as before; indeed, he was not quite certain if he was not more miserable. He had a feeling that all his neighbours as well as his tenants regarded his presence as an intrusion.

His brother Sir George had been immensely popular with everybody. There was scarcely a man in the county that had not a good word to say of him. He was constantly hearing his praises sung, and all the while there seemed to be an undertone of distrust respecting himself. Nor was that undertone entirely in his own imagination.

As a matter of fact, he was altogether untried and, in a large measure, unknown. For twenty years he had been little seen in St. Mullion. Moreover, as

time passed on, vague whispers reached that out-of-the-way parish that during his long absence in India and other places his life had not by any means been too circumspect.

It was discovered also after a while that some of the wonderful tales he had told would not bear the test of calm and quiet reflection, while his military manners and airs were nothing to the taste of the staid and quiet folk of St. Mullion.

Everybody regretted Sir George's death, though no one was surprised at it. He went quietly and without warning. Not getting up at his usual time in the morning, the servant went into his bedroom, the door of which was unlocked, and found him fast asleep—so fast, indeed, that there was for him no earthly waking.

The captain was terribly distressed, for since the untimely fate of Roger he and Sir George had been drawn more closely together than at any other period of their lives. For several weeks before Sir George's death they had been constantly together, and people had remarked on the friendly and even affectionate relations that existed between them.

Hence it was not to be wondered at that the captain should feel his brother's loss acutely, though many people said he might have manifested his grief less ostentatiously, particularly since he had been such a gainer thereby.

Before taking up his residence in London for the season, he made a final appeal to Kitty one day on meeting her returning from a walk. She met him very frankly and candidly, as it was her nature to do.

"No, captain," she said—she could never bring herself to call him Sir Francis—"I have no love to give you."

"No love at all, Miss Kitty?" he pleaded. "No tiny particle for one who would give his life for you?"

"A woman should give more than a tiny particle of love to the man she would marry," Kitty answered. "She should give the whole love of her heart."

"Ah, but, Miss Kitty, love will come! It will grow. Love is a plant to be nurtured in the sweet atmosphere of home."

"But the plant must be there to be nurtured, captain."

"But surely the plant exists, Miss Kitty? There was a time when you did not speak thus to me."

"There was a time when I did not know my own heart. But I know it now."

"And what have I done to produce this change in you?" he pleaded pathetically.

"You have done nothing, captain," she answered. "You have always been exceedingly kind to me."

"And for my kindness this is my reward," he said, with a touch of bitterness in his tones.

"That is not a proper way to speak to me," she said proudly. "I may have been more friendly with you than I ought to have been. I was not out of my teens when you first came here. I own, also, I was flattered by your attentions. But——"

"But you gave me to understand that it was only a question of time, and you would entertain my proposal," he interjected.

"If you got that impression from anything I said, it was very wrong of me," she answered.

"What other impression could I get, Miss Kitty?" he said, a little petulantly. "Did you not ask me not to refer to the matter just then, as you were much upset?"

"I may have done so. But since then I have surely shown you plainly enough that I did not desire your attentions."

"You have been growing increasingly distant with me, I admit. But young ladies, of all people, are not to be judged by outward appearances."

For a moment Kitty's eyes flashed fire. Then she drew herself up proudly, and said, with more than her usual calmness—

"I think this interview had better end."

"And am I to take this as your final answer?"

"I have no other answer to give. I am very sorry if I have caused you pain or annoyance."

" You have caused me both," he said angrily. " You have humiliated me in the most open and public fashion. But you may find out yet that it is a game that two people can play at." And, without waiting for her to reply, he turned on his heel and strode away.

Before many weeks had passed, news reached St. Mullion that the captain was entertaining on a large and lavish scale in his London house. Later news credited him with purchasing a very expensive stud of racehorses. Further reports declared that he escaped by the skin of his teeth during a raid on a gambling club, and that he had gone abroad to winter in the Riviera. Early in the spring it was whispered that he had had a run of good luck at Monte Carlo. This was followed by newspaper reports that his good luck had left him, and that he was losing heavily. Then nothing further was heard of him till the servants at Bewleigh announced that they had received notice to get the house in order, as their master expected to be home in the course of a few weeks.

In the mean time, Davy, the captain's groom, had received a kick from a horse which ultimately cost him his life. During several weeks' confinement before the end came, the rector of St. Mullion, a man of most saintly character, visited Davy regularly, and tried to administer to him spiritual consolation.

But at first all the rector's talk was as so much Greek and Latin to Davy. The poor man listened in a kind of wondering awe, and speculated as to what it was all about. Such colossal ignorance Mr. Penderry had never met with before. He could hardly believe it possible that there was a man in his parish so absolutely ignorant of Divine things, and apparently so destitute of moral sense. Here was a case of pure heathenism at home—within the sound of his own church bells—a case which would tax his missionary zeal to the full.

Mr. Penderry never counted anything a trouble that would lead to spiritual results. He was a man who concerned himself very little about the outward forms of religion. His creed was a very simple one—faith in Jesus Christ, leading to purity of life and conduct. This he preached Sunday by Sunday with apostolic simplicity. His favourite text was, "For I am determined not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," and his actions every day in the week confirmed the genuineness of his faith.

Finding poor Davy so ignorant, he set to work with great diligence to instruct him. It was a task of no small difficulty, and had it not been to the rector such a labour of love he would have given up in despair. He felt for a long time as though he was talking to a blind man about colours, or to a deaf man about sounds. But by-and-by, after much patient waiting and many

prayers, light began to dawn upon the poor man's mind, and a long-slumbering moral sense began to show symptoms of life.

The end came unexpectedly. Davy had been worrying himself a good deal that he would not be well enough to meet the captain on his return. He was also considerably distressed by what the rector had been saying to him. The awakening of his moral sense brought with it a new consciousness of pain. The tree of knowledge was also the tree of good and evil.

Mr. Penderry felt assured that he had something on his mind that troubled him. His bodily pain decreased, but his mental distress became more and more apparent. He gave no indication, however, that he wished to communicate his thoughts to any one.

Towards evening he grew suddenly worse, and Dr. Pascoe was sent for with all possible despatch.

"Doctor," cried Davy, in tones of deepest despair, "be I a-goin' to die?"

"I hope not, Davy—I hope not. Yet I cannot help telling you that you are in very grave danger."

"You mean that the chances are agin my gettin' better?"

"Well, yes; I am afraid they are."

"Don't be afraid of speaking out," Davy cried. "I ain't no coward, and a chap can only die once."

The doctor stood over him. He rubbed his chin reflectively. The case was one that baffled him. That very alarming symptoms had set in there could be no doubt; but it was difficult to prognosticate the result.

"There can be no harm, Davy," he said at length, "if you have any worldly affairs to settle, in settling them at once."

Davy made no reply to that, and a few minutes later the doctor left him.

It was nearly an hour after that that a violent ring came to the rectory door-bell. Mr. Penderry was just getting ready to retire for the night; the maids had already gone upstairs.

"I wonder who can be here at this late hour," he reflected. "I had better go myself and see." And he went at once and unbolted the door.

"If you please, sir, will you come again and see Davy? I'm afraid he's dying, and he wants to see you terribly bad." It was one of the servants from Bewleigh who spoke.

"He has been taken worse, then?" the rector questioned.

"Yes, sir, very much worse. Please come as quickly as you can."

"I will follow you in a few moments," he said. "You go back and say I'm coming."

The rector rushed into the house and pulled on his boots again, took the first hat that came to hand, and a walking-stick, and hurried away to the bedside of the dying man.

He found Davy almost at the last gasp, and evidently in a state of great mental distress.

"I've something to tell you, sir," he said in gasps, "an' I cannot die easy till I've told somebody. Come near, sir, for my breath is gettin' terrible short."

Mr. Penderry sat down by the bedside and bent his ear close to the lips of the dying man, but it seemed as if he had come too late. Davy's power of utterance had almost failed him.

"Fetch a stimulant of some kind," the rector said to a woman who stood near the door. "Be quick—wine, brandy, anything that you have at hand."

In a few moments the woman was back with some brandy, which the rector almost forced between the teeth of the dying man. After a few minutes Davy revived a little.

"It's a longish story I've got to tell," he said faintly ; "give me a little more of that stuff, please. That's better. You'll not believe me, likely, but if you will open—open—grave you'll—you'll—'ave—proof——"

"Whose grave ?" Mr. Penderry questioned eagerly, trembling in every limb ; for he felt as though he was on the point of some startling revelation, and feared

that the man would not have strength to make it plain.

"A little more stuff and come closer," Davy whispered.

The rector poured another teaspoonful down the man's throat, then bent his ear close to Davy's lips and listened.

CHAPTER XII

A GRUESOME TASK

DEATH is never respectful, but ever an intruder.

He never considers human convenience. He comes when least wanted, and at the most inopportune time. It was very evident that Davy had a story to tell, but he was not permitted to tell it. Death touched his heart and silenced his lips. There was an appeal in his eyes to the very last. He struggled desperately to speak; but the rector, whose ear was close to his lips, could only catch a few broken sentences. The one thing that he understood clearly was a request that the grave of Dick Lowry should be opened. All the rest was just a jumble of faintly-whispered words.

Mr. Penderry caught the names of the squire and captain and Jacob, but he could make out no coherent story; and when the Angel of Death left its seal upon Davy's face, he turned away with a look and gesture of disappointment.

He felt sure that there was a mystery at the bottom

—that Davy had a secret of great importance to communicate ; and he wondered why it was that Providence did not grant the man a few more minutes of life, so that he might have cleared up the matter, and made full confession of the secret that lay heavy upon his soul.

The rector wended his way to his home in deep thought. It was now past the hour of midnight, but he did not consider the time nor the feelings of those who were waiting for him. He had left the house without telling his wife, and she was anxiously wondering what had become of him.

He came slowly into the house at length, as though it were early in the day, for his thoughts were intent upon that last interview.

“ Is anything troubling you ? ” his wife questioned.

“ I am troubled a good deal,” he answered. “ The man had a confession to make, a confession I feel of great importance. But, alas ! he had not strength to say what he wished to say, and the secret has died with him.”

“ I think I would not distress myself,” she replied.
“ It may have been nothing of consequence.”

“ From the hints he let drop,” the rector answered, “ I think the matter of great consequence ; but I could only make out one thing clearly. He said that if we would open Dick Lowry’s grave the truth of his story

would be proved. But, alas! we know not what the story is."

"Perhaps his mind was wandering, my dear," Mrs. Penderry observed. "I think I would not trouble further about it. I don't like the idea of opening graves simply because a dying man in his delirium perhaps suggested that such a thing should be done."

"It was not a suggestion arising from delirium," the rector answered gravely. "The man was sane enough. Indeed, his brain seemed to be more than usually clear. He tried his best to speak; but strength failed him, and even to the last there was a look of disappointment and anguish in his eyes that he could not unburden himself of the secret that lay upon his mind."

"But, my dear, what is there about the death of Dick Lowry that should concern you? He died, as you know, from pneumonia. He caught cold while searching for Roger, and when the doctor was called in it was too late. There was nothing mysterious about the matter, and I am sure if I were you I should dismiss the subject from my mind."

"If you had seen Davy, my dear—seen the look of anguish upon his face, seen the effort he made to express himself, marked as I did his dying struggle to unburden his mind—I am sure you would feel as I feel about the matter."

"Then if I felt like that I would have the grave

opened and have done with it. That cannot be a very difficult matter ; and if it will set your mind at rest, why, get it done, my dear, because I do not like to see you worrying after this fashion. Now, do go to bed, for it is after midnight, and you have nearly scared me out of my wits by your long absence."

"I am very sorry," the rector answered, with a smile, "but I will try not to scare you again."

Mrs. Penderry fell fast asleep in a very few minutes. Now that her mind was set at rest respecting her husband, there was nothing more to keep awake for. But the rector courted sleep in vain. Hour after hour he tossed upon his pillow, trying to forget himself in slumber, but his mind was too agitated to permit of sleep. Directly he closed his eyes the vision of Davy's face came before him, and his muttered words echoed through the chambers of his brain and would not be stilled. It was not until far on in the morning that he got a wink of sleep, and when the light of a new day dawned he got up unrested and unrefreshed. After breakfast he locked himself in his own study, and tried to think out some plan of action. If the captain had been at home he would have gone across to Bewleigh at once, and consulted with him as to what should be done ; but the captain being away, there was no one else of sufficient weight or importance near to discuss the matter with.

Getting tired of his own thoughts at length, he put on his hat and went out for a walk. Straying across the churchyard, he stumbled across the sexton, and at once opened a conversation with him. The sexton was always ready to talk about the dead. Nothing interested him so much as a funeral. Digging a grave with him was a work of art, and he prided himself upon his neatness and skill in providing a last resting-place for those of St. Mullion who fell under the shaft of death.

"Was there anything particularly noteworthy about the funeral of young Dick Lowry?" the rector questioned, with an air of apparent indifference.

"No, sir, not as I knows on, sir," the sexton answered. "It were a deep grave, sir, for it were a new one, but there was nothing remarkable about it."

"You noticed nothing peculiar when you lowered the coffin, I presume?" the rector questioned again.

"Why, no, sir. Why should I?" the sexton questioned. "It weren't a particularly heavy coffin, for he was a light young man, as you know, sir."

"Yes, yes; I know he was not a giant in stature," the rector answered.

"I hope you don't think I didn't dig a proper grave for him because he was the son of a drunkard?" the sexton questioned in a tone of alarm.

"Oh no, by no means. As well as I remember, you dug a very nice grave. No, no; it was not that at all.

Good morning, Isaac, good morning." And the rector walked away.

The sexton watched him until he was out of sight ; then, pulling off his hat and scratching his head, he muttered to himself—

" Now I wonder what in the dickens the rector's got in his noddle. What is he a-questioning of me in this way about ? "

But the sexton was quite as much in the dark as to what was in the rector's mind as the rector was with respect to what was in the mind of Davy.

Leaving the churchyard, Mr. Penderry struck off across the fields, and after a while found himself in the neighbourhood of Trevisco.

" Well, now," he reflected, " I wonder if I had not better consult Mr. Bolitho. It is true he is a Dissenter, and never comes to church, while we disagree terribly in politics ; but he is a shrewd and clear-headed man, and I do not like acting on my own responsibility, I really don't."

For a while the rector stood still and debated the question with himself. On some things he did not like asking the opinion of a rank outsider like Mr. Bolitho. If the gentleman had only come to his church, and agreed with him on questions of politics, it would have been different. True, he had been on friendly terms with all the Dissenters in the parish. Nevertheless,

certain proprieties had to be considered, and he was now considering them.

"Shall I, or shall I not?"

At length, like a school-girl, he plucked a flower from the hedge and began to pull off its petals.

"I will—I will not—I will—I will not!" So he repeated the words as the petals fell off from the flower until the last came.

"I will!"

This decided the rector, and he marched straight away to Trevisco and gave a violent ring at the door-bell. Fortunately, Mr. Bolitho was at home, and when the rector was ushered into his room he rose to his feet suddenly, while a look of blank astonishment swept across his face. The rector had not been in his house for over a year, and he could not help wondering what strange circumstance had brought him now.

"Pardon me, calling at such an early hour!" the rector said, grasping Mr. Bolitho's outstretched hand, "but the truth is, a little matter is perplexing me a great deal, and I thought I would come across and ask your advice."

"I shall be delighted, Mr. Penderry, to give the best advice I am able," said Mr. Bolitho, in a somewhat hesitating tone; "but take a chair!" and he wheeled up an easy-chair before the window. The rector fidgeted with his soft hat for several minutes

as if he felt uncertain how to begin the narration of his story.

"The truth is," he said at length, speaking out sharply, and with an air of determination, "Davy, the squire's coachman, died last night."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Bolitho, in a questioning tone.

"And before he died he sent for me," the rector went on. "He had a confession to make; a confession, evidently, that weighed upon his mind and gave him great concern. Unfortunately, by the time I arrived, his strength was too far spent to reveal what was in his heart. Only one thing was I able to make out clearly, and that was that if the grave of Dick Lowry could be opened the truth of his story would be made clear."

"But what was his story?" questioned Mr. Bolitho.

"Ah, there is the difficulty," said the rector quickly. "He had not strength to tell his story, and finding that he had no power left, he simply blurted out these words: 'Open Dick Lowry's grave, and you will have proof of what I say.'"

"And did he give you no hint of anything at all?"

"Practically nothing. I could only catch broken whispers here and there. The names of the captain, and the squire, and Jacob, the Indian servant, I heard

distinctly enough, but there was no coherent story, and when death came to him I was as much in the dark almost as before."

" You think, then, that what he had to tell was of considerable importance ? "

" I feel sure it was, Mr. Bolitho. No one could look into the man's eyes, and mark the anguish of his face, and note how he struggled to explain himself, without feeling that the poor fellow had something of importance to communicate."

" It is unfortunate that you should have been sent for so late," Mr. Bolitho said reflectively.

" I had been with him earlier in the day," the rector observed. " Indeed, I have attended him ever since his accident, and have tried to instruct him in religious things and prepare him for his end, but I never dreamed that he had anything on his mind, and he gave no intimation of it."

" Perhaps he did not think he was going to die," Mr. Bolitho observed.

" No, I think not. When he discovered that recovery was impossible, and that death was near, then his conscience troubled him. He said when I came into the room that he could not die in peace until he had told somebody. I did my best to keep him alive with large doses of brandy; but it was all over with the poor fellow, and the secret has died with him."

"And you want to know what I would advise in the matter?" said Mr. Bolitho, after a long pause.

"That is just it," returned the rector. "The truth is, I am strongly tempted to get an order to open the grave, but I do not like to do so on my own responsibility. It always seems to me a serious matter disturbing the rest of the dead."

"I think I should have no hesitation if I were in your place," Mr. Bolitho answered. "I presume that the young man's father would raise no objection, and if it would set your own mind at rest, or clear up any mystery, I think it ought to be done."

Instantly Mr. Penderry's face brightened.

"I am glad you are of that way of thinking, Mr. Bolitho," he said, "for the truth is I feel I shall not rest until the matter is probed to the bottom. I will go round and talk with old Lowry if he is sufficiently sober, and if not—well, then I think I will take action independently of him."

"I do not think you will find any difficulty whatever," Mr. Bolitho observed, "and in the course of a week or so I should say all formalities may be got through. I should, however, if I were in your place, say nothing about the matter to any one. It is not a subject that one would like discussed in the village and neighbourhood."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Bolitho—quite agree

with you," said the rector warmly. "No, no, I shall keep my own counsel, and I am quite sure you will not refer to the matter. We will get all the preliminaries settled, and then a few responsible people will gather on the spot, and we will have the grave opened. You have taken quite a load off my mind. Now I will return home. Good morning, Mr. Bolitho."

During the next seven or eight days the rector was in a state of nervous excitement that was almost painful to witness. He believed that he was on the verge of a great discovery, and he had scarcely patience to wait until the preliminaries were settled.

It was agreed between Mr. Penderry, Mr. Bolitho, the local constable, and one or two other persons of importance, that the grave should be opened about half-past four in the morning, so that there might be no crowd of inquisitive villagers on the spot at the moment. To keep the matter as secret as possible was eminently desirable. The day would just be peeping over the hills at half-past four, and they concluded that that would be the best time to commence operations.

Mr. Penderry did not sleep a wink that night. He kept his secret well, not even telling his wife when operations were to begin.

When he got into the churchyard he found that the constables were already there before him. It was yet scarcely daylight, and the two guardians of the peace

looked like spectres moving in and out among the tombstones.

Soon after he was joined by Mr. Bolitho, and a few minutes later by the others who were in the secret. Issac the sexton had secured an assistant who helped him in busy times, and in a very few minutes operations were commenced.

The process to the onlooker seemed a very slow one. Minute after minute passed away, and lengthened first into one hour and then into two. The watchers decided at length that they would remain in the church until the coffin was reached. So they betook themselves to a large, square pew, where they carried on a conversation in low tones, looking at their watches every now and then, and wondering when the news would be brought to them that they might proceed again to the open grave.

In the minds of the constables there was a feeling that they were simply the victims of a hoax, or at best of a dying man's illusion.

If there had been anything mysterious about Dick Lowry's death they, of course, would have known it. It was absurd to suppose that there would be any mystery at all. Poor Davy was simply off his head, and imagined that something had gone wrong. Nearing his end, his mind naturally turned on death and the grave, and hence the request that Dick Lowry's grave might be opened.

This they believed was the secret of the whole business. They were quite sure in their own minds that when they came to open the coffin they would find the body of Dick Lowry, or at any rate his bones ; for he had been in his grave more than a year, and unless the coffin was a very good one, decomposition might have done a good deal of its work.

Being public officials, however, they were commendably reticent, and listened while the others discussed the matter, without interruption on their part.

At length the church door was thrown open and Isaac appeared before them.

"We have quite uncovered the coffin," Isaac exclaimed, "but we want you gentlemen to come and help us to lift it out of the grave. It's easy enough to lower a coffin down, but a different matter to pull it up again."

At once there was a stampede from the church to the graveside, and all gathered round it panting with anticipation and excitement.

It was not an easy matter to lift the coffin out of a fairly deep grave, but after some time the task was accomplished.

There was now some further delay, for the sexton had to fetch his screwdriver from a tool-chest that he kept in the church-tower. Impatience was written on every face while Isaac ran, with as much rapidity as he could,

across the graves to fetch the tool in question, and when he came back every one heaved a sigh of relief.

To Mr. Penderry the excitement had now become intense. He saw the sexton turn the screws one after the other and pull them out of the coffin-lid, and when at length only two screws remained he could hardly keep his excitement within bounds.

"Now then, Daniel," Isaac said to his companion, "put your hand to the other end of the lid and we will lift it off straight."

The others stood back while Daniel advanced. There was just a little wrench, the lid was lifted from its place, and the coffin stood open before the little crowd of anxious gazers.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

BY breakfast-time every one in St. Mullion knew that Dick Lowry's grave had been opened, and that the coffin, instead of containing Dick's body, contained only the trunk of a tree.

It would be impossible to describe the look of wonder and consternation that swept over the face of the rector and the others who stood with him when the coffin-lid was thrown aside and the truth was made manifest. For several minutes not a sound broke the silence. The half-dozen men crowded round and simply stared.

Isaac was the first to speak.

"This ain't no body," he said. "Mortal bodies don't get turned into trees."

"Most remarkable!" Mr. Bolitho ejaculated under his breath.

The constables looked at one another and at the open coffin, but they made no remark. Their surmise

had been entirely falsified, and they were not prepared with a theory that would meet this new development.

The rector drew a long breath, then stretched himself to his full height.

"Isaac," he said, and his voice shook in spite of his effort to steady it, "lift out the log of wood, and let's see if there's anything underneath."

Isaac obeyed at once, and the constables stepped forward to assist. The tree-trunk was partially wrapped in what was once a white sheet.

"Now, Isaac, be careful," said the senior guardian of the peace, who rejoiced in the name of Polkinghorne. "There may be some writing or a piece of paper or something that will give us a clue."

Isaac lifted the trunk very gingerly, as though he was handling a dead body.

Polkinghorne stooped down and began to unwrap the sheet.

The second constable tapped the coffin in different places to make sure that it had no false bottom or any other secret contrivance.

Mr. Bolitho looked on in grim silence.

In a very few minutes the examination was completed, and the little group stood quite still once more and stared. There was no writing or clue of any kind. The coffin stood empty before them, the log of wood lay on the grass by its side. The damp, yellow, earth-

stained sheet was thrown over a tombstone to dry. What more was to be done or said ?

Each one appeared to be waiting for the others to speak. The constables were itching to make an arrest of some kind. Polkinghorne would have arrested the sexton if he dared. It seemed to him positively ridiculous that there should be a mystery of this kind and he not able to make capital out of it.

He waited in silence, hoping some one would suggest foul play, or burglary, or assault. He wanted to be doing something. It was humiliating to stand there a discredited guardian of the peace. He had predicted something so totally different from what had been discovered. He had been so absolutely cocksure that they would alight on a mare's nest that the sequel completely bewildered him.

Isaac and his assistant stood helplessly scratching their heads and looking at the others. The silence was doubtless only of a few moments' duration, but it seemed an age. At length Isaac could bear it no longer.

"Look 'ere, sur," he said, turning to the rector, "shall us put the things back into the coffin and bury 'em again ?"

"By no means, by no means!" said Mr. Penderry sharply. "What say you, Mr. Bolitho ?"

"Well, I should suggest," said Mr. Bolitho slowly,

with a wave of his hand in the direction of the coffin, "that it—it be taken into the tower—that is, for the present."

"A very good suggestion," said the rector quickly—"a very good suggestion. Don't you think so, Polkinghorne?"

"Well, sir, it shouldn't be exposed here in the churchyard. The boys would be making a football of it afore the day is out."

"Well, hardly that," said the rector, with a smile—"hardly that. But it isn't the kind of thing to leave here for every one to stare at."

"And after it's took away and put under lock and key," questioned the constable, "what then?"

"I don't know, Polkinghorne. Circumstances will have to decide. At present we are all in the dark."

"But don't 'ee think, sir, that the machinery of the law should be set to work to riddle out this 'ere mystery, as it were?"

"I should say that was your job," observed Isaac sagely; "you are the machinery of the law in St. Mullion, bean't you?"

"I was talking to the rector," said the constable, casting upon Isaac a look of lofty scorn.

"And I was talkin' to you," said Isaac blandly.

"This is neither the time nor the place for bandying words," said the rector sharply. "Without doubt there

is a mystery. If you constables can get to the bottom of it you will earn the thanks of every one."

"How be we to get to the bottom of a thing when there's nothing to work upon?" said Polkinghorne crossly. "If we could arrest somebody there'd be some sense in it."

"I'm not aware that there is any suspicion of foul play in the case," was the reply; "but if I might make a suggestion to all who are present, it is this—that we keep the matter as quiet as possible. In the mean time, if Isaac will go down to the house of old Lowry and ask him to come on to the rectory, Mr. Bolitho and myself may be able to get something out of him."

"I consider I'm the proper person to go to see Lowry," said Polkinghorne, drawing himself up stiffly.

"No," said the rector with emphasis; "your going would excite attention and remark. You are at liberty to make inquiries in any other direction you like."

"Must I go at once, sir?" asked the sexton.

"First help to carry these things into the tower, and see that the door is properly locked. Mr. Bolitho and I will wait for Lowry in my study."

"Likely enough he bean't out of bed yet," Isaac observed.

"Ah! I'm forgetting," said the rector, glancing swiftly round him. "Dear me!"—and he pulled out his watch—"why, it's only seven o'clock yet. I thought

it must be nearly noon. What a long day this will seem!"

Mr. Bolitho smiled.

"You are not in the habit of getting up so early, Mr. Penderry?" he observed.

"I'm not, and that's the truth. But come on to the rectory and have breakfast with me. I had quite forgotten that I had come fasting to this place. I understand now how it is that I feel so limp."

"I was careful to have something to eat before I came," Mr. Bolitho said; "but I shall be glad, nevertheless, to accept your hospitality."

In a few minutes the churchyard was empty, and the only sign of what had taken place was the open grave. Mr. Penderry and Mr. Bolitho adjourned to the rectory, and the others wended their way down to the village.

It was fifteen minutes past seven when the sexton's assistant, Daniel Polmounter, whispered to Richard Cobbledick, as a profound secret, what had taken place that morning in the churchyard. Ten minutes later, Richard, under promise of the most profound secrecy, had communicated the intelligence to twelve other people, including his wife and seven women besides. Meanwhile, Daniel Polmounter had been dropping the secret about every fifty yards or so as he journeyed to his home. So that in about half an hour there were twenty centres in St. Mullion from which the secret

radiated. By eight o'clock everybody in the place knew, and the intelligence was still spreading up the hillsides to lonely cottages and distant farmsteads, and so beyond the hilltops to villages out of sight. Butchers' boys, bakers' boys, grocers' boys, showed an alertness in executing orders that was most unusual with them, for each lad was eager to be the first to carry the wonderful tidings that were shaking St. Mullion to its foundations.

Kitty Bolitho heard the news directly she came down to breakfast. Her two brothers, Stanley and Rex, were discussing the matter with great animation. Mrs. Bolitho sat behind the tea-urn, looking very grave.

"What are you boys chattering about?" Kitty asked, with a smile. "I could hear you when I was halfway down the stairs."

"You will never guess," said Rex, who was standing at the sideboard carving at a ham.

"I don't think I shall try. Would you mind helping me to a little of that? But where is father?"

"You'll never guess that either," Stanley observed from the other side of the table.

"Dear me, what a nest of mysteries! But what is it all about?"

"It's a real mystery this time," said Rex. "A tip-topper!"

"But hardly a subject to be discussed while eating one's breakfast," Mrs. Bolitho observed quietly.

"Oh, I don't see that!" said Rex. "Besides, Kit does not belong to the squeamish sort."

"Come, out with it!" Kitty said laughingly. "And don't beat about the bush any longer."

"Stanley will tell you—he heard the news first," Rex observed, and came and took his seat at the table.

In a few moments Kitty had dropped her knife and fork, and was listening with parted lips and wide-open, questioning eyes.

"But what does it mean?" she gasped, when Stanley had finished his story.

"That's more than any one knows," was the answer. "Father may have some theory to advance when he comes home."

"Father has been and seen it all?"

"He went out at four o'clock this morning," Mrs. Bolitho said.

"And where is he now?"

"Oh, he's discussing the matter with the rector over the breakfast-table," laughed Stanley.

"Father gone to the rectory to breakfast?" Kitty said wonderingly. "I wonder what will happen next?"

"It seems to be a sort of reunion of Christendom on a small scale," Rex observed, with a smile. "We shall be having the parson at a chapel tea-fight next."

"And I quite expect father will open the next church bazaar," broke in Stanley.

"After which Mrs. Penderry will be seen drinking afternoon tea in Mrs. Bolitho's drawing-room."

"And why not?" broke in Kitty. "It's absolutely silly the way Church and Dissent keep apart in a place like this."

"They don't understand each other, my dear," said Rex with gravity.

After this byplay a long silence fell. There were thoughts fermenting in the brain of each that could not be shaped into words—questions, surmises, suspicions so vague and shadowy that verbal expression was out of the question.

Kitty withdrew herself from the table as soon as she could and retired to her own room. Her thoughts had been sent back again with a rush to an earlier time when Roger was with her.

"Dear Roger," she said to herself softly. "I shall never see his like again."

She could not understand exactly why the curious circumstance brought to light that morning should make her think of Roger, and yet it did. It even awoke in her heart a vague hope that almost startled her, and which she tried to banish as quickly as possible.

On the mantelpiece was a portrait of Roger, and a

remarkably good one, the eyes of which followed her all about the room.

"Ah, Roger," she said, pausing before it and looking tenderly into the deep, earnest eyes, "if I hadn't been foolish everything might have been different. But like a giddy schoolgirl I was dazzled by tinsel and gilt and show, and I hadn't sense enough to look beneath the surface." And she sighed and turned away her head.

"We learn by experience," she went on with a wistful, far-away look in her eyes, "and by the time we have mastered the lesson it is too late to be of service to us. If we could only undo and start afresh, life would not seem such a mockery; knowledge comes when it is too late." And she locked her hands behind her back and paced slowly up and down the room.

"Ah, if it was Roger's grave that was found empty," she said to herself at length, "I might indulge in dreams! But the absence of poor young Lowry's body cannot alter anything."

A few minutes later she heard her father's voice downstairs, and instantly rushed down to question him. But the others were before her. Rex and Stanley and Mrs. Bolitho seemed as eager as she to know the latest phase of the mystery.

"I know no more than you do," Mr. Bolitho was

saying when she came into the room. "Mr. Penderry and myself have been debating the question for the last hour, but we can make nothing of it. It seems a thousand pities that Davy did not live a few minutes longer; as it is, he has simply whetted curiosity, and left us in the dark."

"But the discovery may yet lead to something," Rex observed.

"Well, I don't know," Mr. Bolitho said slowly. "To tell you the truth, I don't see anything that it can lead to. There is nothing outside itself, shall I say, that wants explaining. The only mysterious thing that has occurred in St. Mullion for years past is the drowning of Roger, but the disappearance of young Lowry's body can have nothing to do with that."

"Then you think it is simply a case of body-snatching?"

"I don't say that. Body-snatchers would scarcely take the trouble to substitute a tree-trunk."

"I can't help thinking there is more in it than we imagine," Rex said reflectively. "I confess I should like to probe the thing to the bottom."

"That it is a very curious affair there can be no doubt," said Mr. Bolitho. "I confess I am quite excited over it. I am hoping that old Lowry, when we can get hold of him, will be able to throw some light on it."

"Then you have not seen him?" Kitty questioned.

"No. Isaac the sexton went to fetch him; but he was in bed and fast asleep, and when the old woman who keeps his house went and woke him, he vowed he would not come to the rectory for anybody. However, Mr. Penderry has sent Polkinghorne to fetch him. So I expect he will be turning up directly, but I could not wait any longer. I must get to my letters at once." And Mr. Bolitho hurried away to his study.

Half an hour later there was a sharp ring at the front-door bell, and a few minutes after the housemaid came into the dining-room and informed Kitty and her mother that Miss Dorothy Penderry had been shown into the drawing-room.

Now, it should be said that Dorothy was almost a stranger in St. Mullion. During the last three years she had been studying music in Germany, and before that she was mostly away at boarding-school; hence very few of her father's parishioners knew anything about her, and the Bolithos, not being Church people, knew nothing at all.

She was reputed to be very pretty, very clever, and very sweet, but somewhat shy and reserved with strangers. She had been back from Germany only about a month, and as yet was scarcely reckoned a part of St. Mullion.

Kitty looked at her mother, and Mrs. Bolitho looked at Kitty.

"We must go to her at once," the latter observed. "I wonder what she can want at this hour of the day?"

"Pardon me calling so early," Dorothy explained very prettily, "but father had no one else for the moment to send. He wants to see Mr. Bolitho at once. Old Mr. Lowry is with him. He says that Lowry has the most astonishing story to tell that he ever heard. I think I never saw father so excited before."

Kitty ran out of the room at once, and nearly fell over her brother Rex in the hall.

"Fetch father into the drawing-room," she said; "Miss Dorothy Penderry is here."

"Mystery upon mystery," Rex observed, with a genial smile, and hurried up the stairs three steps at a time to his father's private den.

A few minutes later both men were confronting Dorothy. But while Mr. Bolitho was all ears, Rex was all eyes. He thought he had never seen so dainty a bit of womanhood before in his life.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Bolitho. "I will go at once. I hope we are at the bottom of the mystery now."

CHAPTER XIV

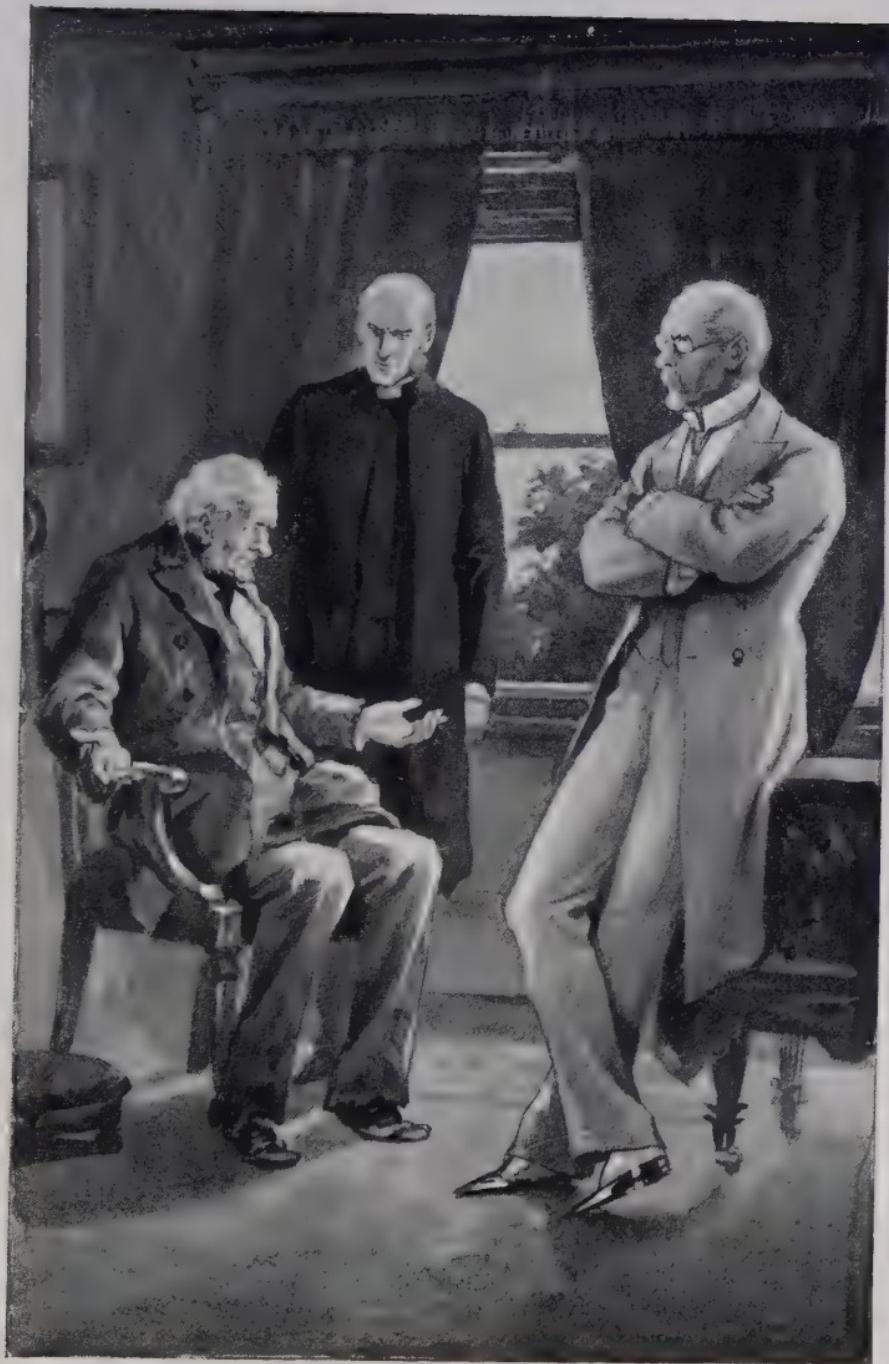
OLD LOWRY'S STORY

M^{R.} BOLITHO lost no time in reaching the rectory, and on his arrival was at once shown into the study. He found Mr. Penderry walking up and down in a state of great excitement, while in an easy-chair by the fireplace sat old Lowry, maudlin and tearful as usual. He had been shedding tears very profusely while unfolding his narrative to the rector, and on the arrival of Mr. Bolitho he proceeded to shed more tears, which for some time choked his utterance and prevented a fresh repetition of his story.

As soon as he could sufficiently control himself, he lifted his watery eyes to Mr. Bolitho, and said—

“ I be very much cut up, I be—I be terrible upset ; I never did think such a thing could happen. I did not know what was being done or I would never have consented. I did think it was all right. Oh, I shall never get over this great grief that has come to me ! ”

“ But what is it all about ? ” said Mr. Bolitho shortly.
“ Let me hear the story from the beginning.”



"I BE VERY MUCH CUT UP, I BE."

"Perhaps," interposed the rector, "I had better tell you the story, as Mr. Lowry has told it to me. It may be I can tell it more briefly, as I shall leave out all unnecessary details. You will correct me, I am sure, Lowry, if I state anything that is not in accordance with facts?"

"That I will, sir," said Lowry. "I will be very much obliged to you if you will tell the gentleman the story. I be so upset that I can't talk proper, as I ought to do to gentlemen."

"As I understand the narrative, it is as follows," said Mr. Penderry. "The night before the funeral of Mr. Lowry's son two men called at his house. It was then nearly midnight, and all St. Mullion would be asleep. His house, as you know, Mr. Bolitho, stands alone outside the village, so that no one would be likely to see the entrance of these strangers. They appear to have driven up in a vehicle of some kind, but what kind of vehicle it was Mr. Lowry does not know; he simply heard the sound of wheels and horses' feet. They were both of them men with long black beards, and he does not remember to have seen them before. One of them spoke with a strange accent as though he was a foreigner. They were both swarthy in appearance as far as he remembers. They represented themselves as being doctors connected with the hospital at Plymouth. They had heard of the death of his son, and were very

anxious to make an examination for medical and scientific purposes. If Mr. Lowry would let them remove his son's body to the St. Mullion Infirmary for the space of an hour or so they would be much obliged, as the examination they wished to make was a very simple one, and would take only a short time. They said they would bring back the body again in the course of an hour or two hours at the outside. It seems at first Mr. Lowry was shocked at the proposal, and protested violently that he would not have the remains of his son interfered with. They urged the matter first on grounds of humanity and the gain to science, but Mr. Lowry's paternal feelings rose superior to all their arguments. He cared little about the interests of science, and the claims of humanity just then did not appeal to him."

"Ah, my boy were more to me," grunted the old man, "than all the claims of humanity in the world."

"So we understand," said Mr. Penderry ; "but allow me to proceed, as I understand the narrative. Finding that Mr. Lowry would not consent to the removal of the body of his son on the grounds named, they offered him money. They said they were interested in science, and, of course, were well-to-do, and were willing to pay for the privilege of examining the body. First they offered five pounds, then ten, then twenty, but still Mr. Lowry stood firm. Though he was poor, and his son

on whom he depended had been taken from him, he refused to take the bribe. At length they increased the amount to fifty pounds, and actually counted out the fifty sovereigns on the table.

"At sight of so much money Mr. Lowry began to hesitate. He was poor, and fifty pounds to him then seemed inexhaustible riches. Is not that so, Mr. Lowry?"

"'Tis indeed, sir. If you was a poor man like me, you would find that fifty pounds did seem sich a lot of money. Besides, they did say that they would not hurt the boy; that nothing they would do would disfigure him; that, being dead, he wouldn't feel nothing; and that I ought not to stand in the way of my own interests."

"And so at length you yielded?" said Mr. Bolitho.

"No. I said that if they made it sixty pounds I would close with them."

"And they made it sixty pounds?"

"Well, no. We agreed in the end to split the difference, and they laid another five pounds on the table, and then I left the room."

"You left the room, did you?"

"Yes, sir. I didn't want to see nothing that was being done."

"Well, and what after that?"

"Well, I think I dropped off to sleep, sir, for I were

very tired and sleepy. But about two o'clock in the morning, I reckon it was, they come back again. They told me that they had made the examination and had brought back the body. I saw them bring something into the house wrapped up in a white sheet, and I felt that queer that I did go back into my room ; and when I came back again they had put on the coffin-lid and screwed it down. And, of course, I did not want to look any more, and didn't think but what everything was right."

"And you had no suspicion but that they had brought back the body of your son ? "

"Such a thing as doubting never crossed my mind."

"Then it would be a very great surprise when you heard of the discovery we made this morning ? "

"It were a terrible surprise, sir. I haven't got over it yet. I do feel terrible upset to think my poor boy has had no proper burial. What will become of him in the Resurrection if them doctors have cut him all to pieces ? "

"And you have no suspicion who the men were ? "

"Not the least ghost of a suspicion, sir. They were quite strange to me. I never saw either of them before."

"And have you seen either of them since ? "

"Not that I knows on, sir. They was quite strange to me."

"And do you think you would recognise them again if you were to see them?"

"Well, I really don't know, sir. I didn't see their faces very clear. There was only one candle in the room, and you know one candle don't give very much light."

"But you say they had both long beards?"

"Yes, sir; both on 'em."

"And that one spoke with a foreign accent?"

"He did; sir; but the other did most of the talkin'."

"And you do not recollect having heard his voice before?"

"No, sir; they were both strange."

"Did they look like gentlemen?"

"Well, sir, they did seem very well dressed, both of them; tall and well-set-up gentlemen. I thought they were real doctors."

"And do you think now they were doctors?"

"Bless 'ee, sir, I don't know what to think." And the old man began to wipe his eyes again.

"Your story is strange enough," said Mr. Bolitho, after a long pause; "but it does not seem to throw much light on the question."

"But what be I to do, sir?" said Lowry, with a fresh burst of tears. "It was some comfort to think that I had a son in the churchyard, but now I haven't that to comfort me; and, beside, the money they did

give me is spent, and I'll soon have nothing to live upon."

"That may not be a misfortune," said Mr. Bolitho. "If I am any judge of the matter, you would have been as well without the money. You are not so old yet but that you could work if you chose."

"I think them hard words to a man who is in such great trouble," said Lowry, suddenly drying his eyes.

"I don't think them hard at all," said Mr. Bolitho. "Here is half-a-crown for you, and, what is more, as I presume you are unable to follow your own trade, if you will come to Trevisco, and are not above doing a little light work in the garden, I shall be glad to employ you. Now you can go."

"I be obliged to you, sir, and will think about it," was the reply. And he slouched out of the house.

When he had gone Mr. Bolitho turned to the rector.

"Well," he said, "we seem no nearer the end now than we were at the beginning."

"I am not so sure of that," said the rector. "Several thoughts have been raised in my own mind, but I must consider the matter further before speaking."

"Do you associate in any way the disappearance of the body with the fate of young Roger Carew?"

"I hardly know what I think," said the rector slowly and reflectively. "At present I can see no connection

between the two things, but there may be a connection nevertheless."

"It is rather an uncomfortable suspicion to get into one's mind," Mr. Bolitho observed.

"It is scarcely even a suspicion," said Mr. Penderry. "I seem like a man walking in a fog. Every now and then shapes loom up suddenly like spectres, and vanish as soon as they appear."

"But what are the points that impress themselves on your mind?" inquired the other.

"Well," said the rector, "there must be a reason why these men, whoever they were, wanted the body of young Lowry. That it was not for medical or scientific purposes is clear enough, but that they were intensely anxious to secure it is evident from the fact that they paid fifty-five pounds to old Lowry to allow them to take it away. Moreover, if they merely wanted to make an examination, they would have brought it back again. There must, therefore, be something at the bottom. To find out that I shall leave no stone unturned."

"I still fail to see what you are driving at," said Mr. Bolitho, after a pause.

"To tell you the truth, I hardly know myself," was the reply. "I cannot say I have any suspicion. My thoughts do not amount to that. Only vague questions and surmises keep running through my mind. There

is, as you know, a reason for everything. Young Roger Carew's death remains unexplained to this day. Young Lowry died the day after Roger's disappearance. Roger's body was found a week later, much decomposed."

"But it was his body; you do not question that?"

"Ah, now!" said Mr. Penderry, rising suddenly to his feet, "you have raised another question. Could it be possible that the body that was buried as Roger's was that of young Lowry? You know they were very much alike in appearance."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Bolitho, in alarm, "you are raising a very serious question, a question with far-reaching consequences. It is well that we are alone in this room."

"Yes, yes; I see all that," said the rector, drawing his hand across his forehead. "Excuse me saying so much. Let us be silent on the matter, Mr. Bolitho, and wait the working of God's providence."

"Mr. Penderry," he said, "I think we may be perfectly frank with each other and speak candidly of what is in our minds. Let us suppose a case. Young Lowry was very like Roger in appearance. He died the day after Roger had vanished from sight. A week later Roger's body was found in the river. He had on his usual clothes; his gold watch had stopped at a particular hour. No one doubted for a moment that it was Roger's body; the question of

identity was not raised. Suppose, however, that it was not Roger's body, but young Lowry's. In that case young Lowry is in the Carew tomb at this moment; but where is Roger?"

"Mr. Bolitho!" exclaimed the rector, looking up with a startled expression, "that is precisely the train of thought that has been running through my mind. Would anybody be interested in Roger's disappearance? If so, there is a possible clue to the whole mystery!"

"It seems to me," said Mr. Bolitho, speaking with great deliberation, "that we may be on the track of a foul crime. Let us suppose that Roger was murdered, that his body was hidden somewhere—buried. If the murderer could get hold of Lowry's body, and dress it in Roger's clothes, and drop it into the river, don't you see that all suspicion of the crime would be removed? It would be assumed at once that Roger came by his death either accidentally, or that, in a moment of depression, he committed suicide. The whole scheme in that case would be a remarkably clever one. I confess I am beginning to see light. Roger perhaps did not die the way we have thought. Our business now is to try to discover, if we can, Roger's body, or such of it as remains."

"After this lapse of time that would be very difficult," said the rector. "I am afraid that this is a

case that is beyond our power to unravel. The more I think of it the more I am convinced that there has been some desperate crime; and yet I see no way of tracking it home."

Then silence fell again; both men became so engrossed in their thoughts that they might have been unaware of each other's presence. The owner of Trevisco was the first to speak.

"Suppose we were to get an order and open the coffin that is thought to contain the body of Roger, is there any mark by which it could be identified?"

"The very thing!" said the rector eagerly—"the very thing! We must have up old Lowry again, and question him on the point. There may have been a broken bone, or some malformation, by which the body could be identified beyond all dispute."

"We might, however, have some difficulty in getting permission to open the vault," said Mr. Bolitho.

"You think the captain might object?"

"I do not know; he might raise a very strong objection. Nevertheless, in that direction must be our next move."

"I think we had better wait until he returns to Bewleigh, and then approach him on the subject. Meanwhile, we had better both of us keep our suspicions to ourselves. To make them public just now might get us into serious trouble. We must

remember that we have only formulated a theory, and it may be altogether an erroneous one."

As soon as Mr. Bolitho returned he called Rex to his study. Rex was his eldest son, and in large measure his confidant. Directly the door was closed behind them Mr. Bolitho related old Lowry's story, and then asked Rex if, from the narrative, he could frame any reasonable theory.

"Why do you ask?" Rex asked.

"Well, Mr. Penderry and myself, in talking the matter over, found that certain questions and surmises, and even suspicions, were raised in our minds, till at length these suspicions shaped themselves into something like a theory, and it would be a relief if a third party, independent of the other two, were to arrive at a similar conclusion."

Rex reflected for some time, and then declared that he could see nothing in the story at all.

"Very good," said his father. "I will say nothing further now, but let it simmer in your mind for a while. Perhaps some theory will shape itself before the week is out."

Later in the day, while walking in the village, Rex came face to face with Dorothy Penderry.

"Are you going home?" he inquired.

"Yes, I am," she replied with a smile.

"Well, I am going in the direction of your home," Rex said.

For a little way they walked in silence ; then, very naturally, their conversation turned in the direction of the subject that was the absorbing topic of interest in St. Mullion.

" Did you ever notice the likeness between Roger and young Lowry ? " Dorothy questioned.

" I was often struck with it," Rex remarked.

" Wasn't it very curious that he should have died about the time that Roger disappeared ? " she questioned.

" It was somewhat singular," he answered slowly.

" There would be no connection between the two events, of course ? "

" Connection ? " he questioned, as if to himself. Then he grew suddenly silent, while a look of perplexity came into his eyes and clouded his brow.

During the rest of the day Dorothy had time to reflect that, while Rex Bolitho was undoubtedly handsome, he was also very absent-minded.

CHAPTER XV

HINTS AND CLUES

ON reaching home, Rex hurried at once to his father's room. Mr. Bolitho, though a millionaire, was deeply engrossed in commercial pursuits; while both his sons had caught their father's spirit, and were looked upon as two of the keenest business men in the county.

Mr. Bolitho looked up from his papers when Rex entered, and encountered the eager face of his son with a smile.

"Are you busy, father?" Rex questioned.

"Well, I am rather, my boy. You see I am doing your work. You have been taking holiday to-day."

"Well, then, you may put it aside for a while, as I want to speak with you."

"Very good," said Mr. Bolitho, pushing his hands into his pockets and stretching out his legs; "what have you new to communicate?"

"Well, I want to ask you a question. Has it occurred to you that the body found in the river was not Roger's body at all, but young Lowry's?"

"Why do you ask, my lad?"

"Well, the thought has suddenly occurred to me. I cannot get it out of my mind. I feel convinced somehow that a crime has been committed, and that the body of Lowry was simply used as a blind."

"That is the theory, to tell you the truth, that Mr. Penderry and myself had formed. I am glad that you have reached the same conclusion without help from us. Now, as you are young and active and keenly interested, while I am getting old, I should like you to take the matter up, and, if possible, probe it to the bottom. I have some very unpleasant suspicions which I will not mention yet. I will allow you to have as much time away from business as you like. But this is a matter that deeply interests me, and I should like to get to the bottom of it."

"The first step, it seems to me," said Rex, "is to prove the identity of the body in the Carews' vault."

"Exactly," replied Mr. Bolitho; "and to this end, if I were in your place, I would question old Lowry at once as to whether there was any mark by which his son could be identified."

Rex lost no time in visiting old Lowry, but found him too much under the influence of drink to be of any service to him. On the following morning, however, his head was more clear, and he was able to give some particulars that Rex thought might prove of advantage.

Several years before his left elbow had been badly broken, and it was just possible that the state of the bone might be a sufficient clue to his identity. Rex hurried away at once to Dr. Pascoe. The old doctor had set the arm, and was quite sure that he would be able to recognise the arm-bone among all the other bones in St. Mullion churchyard.

From Dr. Pascoe's, Rex went on to the rectory, and had a long chat with Mr. Penderry, after which he found himself walking in the garden with Dorothy, and so pleasant did he find her company that he forgot for a while the subject that had been engrossing his attention.

Dorothy was so winsome and pretty, so well-informed and cheerful, so light-hearted and gay, that it seemed impossible to think of anything very serious while in her company. Dorothy, however, had her serious moods and her sober thoughts.

While she laughed and chatted with Rex, she could not help thinking what a pity it was that such a handsome, well-informed young man should remain outside the Church. It was only natural, from the very nature of her education and environment, that she should think that all who were not of her way of thinking in the matter of religion were heretics, and far away from the true fold. And so, as she walked and talked with Rex in the garden in the beautiful sunshine, with the flowers

blooming all about and exhaling their perfume on the air, she formulated a little scheme of her own, which she would try and execute in the days and weeks to come.

She might be a missionary in her own neighbourhood, and if this handsome young fellow could only be won away from heresy and be made to see the danger to which he was exposed, and led into the true fold, what a victory it would be for her!

It was an enterprise that might tax her faith and try her patience, but the issues were so great that it was surely worth the attempt. No amount of labour or even sacrifice could be too great, if thereby one soul could be won from error and led into the light and truth.

Rex had no idea of the designs that Dorothy had upon him, and if he had, it would not have made the least difference. He was a sturdy Nonconformist—not of the goody-goody type by any means, but healthy, active, and clean-minded. He had a perfect hatred of cant and sham and show. To live purely, to do one's duty, to obey God and serve to the best of his ability his generation, summed up very largely his whole idea of religion. Questions of creed and sect and dogma interested him very little. If a man lived squarely and uprightly, that in the main was sufficient for him.

A day or two later the captain appeared upon the

scene, and was at once pounced upon by Mr. Penderry. Mr. Bolitho declined to accompany the rector; but he waited, nevertheless, in a fever of impatience, the result of the interview.

"If the captain is in any way implicated," he said to Rex, "or if he knows anything about the matter, he will refuse to give his consent for the tomb to be opened. You see, the captain is the only one who has profited by the disappearance of Roger. I cannot, however, bring myself to believe that he knows anything about the matter. If he consents at once for the tomb to be opened, I shall conclude that he is perfectly innocent, and it will be a great load off my mind."

The captain received the rector with great warmth and cordiality.

"You know, of course, what has transpired here during the last week or two?" the rector questioned.

"As a matter of fact I know nothing," said the captain. "I have been out of the way of St. Mullion news."

"It has got into the papers," said the rector, "so I thought possibly it had reached you."

"No St. Mullion news has come to me," said the captain. "What is it that you refer to?"

So the rector, in as few words as possible, told the captain the whole story, and watched his face very intently as he did so. The captain changed colour more

than once, and seemed greatly distressed, though he said very little. When, however, the rector propounded the scheme for opening the Carews' vault, and ascertaining whether the body was that of Roger or no, the captain visibly started, and for a moment seemed to hesitate; then, drawing himself together with an effort, he said quite calmly—

"By all means make the investigation; this is a matter of vital importance. We should get at the truth at all costs. I shall be only too happy to render you all the assistance in my power."

The rector gave a sigh of relief. He had been fearing that the captain might object, and had he done so the worst suspicions that had crossed his mind would have received corroboration.

Now, however, when the captain expressed himself as ready to render all assistance to clear up the mystery, Mr. Penderry felt assured that he knew nothing of the matter.

Within the course of a few weeks all necessary formalities were obtained and carried through, and it was established beyond all shadow of doubt that the suspicions of the rector and Mr. Bolitho were quite correct; and the body that had lain in the Carew vault for more than a year was removed and laid in the grave that had been dug for young Lowry.

But though this point was established beyond all

dispute, the mystery was by no means solved. The question on everybody's lips now was, "Where is Roger?"

Some people went so far as to question his decease. He might have gone away from home in a quixotic frame of mind, they said, and would in the course of time turn up again. This theory, however, was only entertained by a few. It was not likely that if Roger were alive he would fling up so splendid an inheritance merely for the sake of quixotic adventure. Moreover, the very fact that two men had taken the body of Lowry, in order that it might act as a blind, was proof positive that there had been foul play.

In the minds of most thinking people there was very little doubt that Roger had been murdered and his body hidden; and the point most eagerly discussed was: Who had done the deed, and for what purpose?

As far as it was known he had not an enemy in the world. He was on the best of terms with all the people in the parish—his goodness and manliness and generosity were on every one's lips. Rich and poor alike admired him for his gentleness and geniality and uprightness of life. Hence that any one should have murdered him out of sheer wantonness seemed incredible.

Had he been in possession of a large sum of money there might have been some motive for such a crime, but that robbery was not the intention was evident

from the fact that his valuable watch was still in his pocket when the body was found, and also all the money he possessed remained in his purse.

The captain became one of the most active in the efforts that were made to solve the mystery. Any suggestion by Rex or the rector he was ready to adopt, and quick to carry into effect.

"I can assure you," he said one day to the rector, "that no one can be so interested in probing this matter to the bottom as myself. You see I am the only one who profited by Roger's death. God knows I did not want the property, and even now it is more a burden to me than anything else. I was content to live on my simple means in my simple way; and as for my nephew, I loved him as if he was my own son; while George was the best brother in the world. You will see therefore that for the sake of my good name I am anxious to clear up the mystery, and greatly shall I be relieved when we have discovered the secret of the crime, for I feel sure with you that a crime has been committed."

"My dear sir," said the rector warmly, "I am sure that no one can accuse you even in thought of any unworthy motive. You have acted in a most exemplary way throughout the whole trying business."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Penderry," said the captain warmly. "What a thousand pities it was

poor Davy died so soon! If you had only got there half an hour earlier we should have known the secret of the whole business. Davy evidently saw something, and kept it to himself. I cannot understand why he should not have told me at once."

"It is a puzzling affair, whichever way we look at it," said the rector; "but as far as I can see now we may as well cease to trouble ourselves about the matter. Poor Roger has evidently been made away with, but when or where none of us can tell. We must leave it now in the hands of God. They say murder will out; perhaps sooner or later the mystery will be made clear."

For the next two or three weeks very little else was talked about in St. Mullion, but the subject very naturally exhausted itself, as such subjects always do. No fresh light was thrown upon the matter, no fresh discovery was made. Rex used all his wits in all directions, but could discover no clue whatever to the problem, and after a while he gave up the quest. To pursue the matter further seemed only waste of time and energy.

As time wore away the only one who seemed to cherish any real hope that Roger might still be alive was Kitty. Kitty had never ceased to upbraid herself for the part she had played. Roger's disappearance was a constant cloud upon her mind. It struck a note of

pain and discord that she feared would never die out of the music of her life.

Moreover, she discovered when it was too late that she had given all her heart to the companion of her childhood and youth. When the glamour of the captain's presence and heroism had died away, and she was able to estimate by contrast the real worth of Roger, she discovered that the captain's influence was only a momentary fascination ; she had been dazzled by cheap tinsel and cheaper heroism, while by contrast Roger's real worth loomed large before her mental vision.

With a woman's unforgetting devotion she hugged his memory to her heart, and dwelt constantly in thought upon his many excellences. She lived over again and again the happy hours and days they had spent together ; she lived in imagination through all the pleasant paths of their childhood and youth, and called to mind a thousand little acts that proved Roger's love and devotion, and she blamed herself with unnecessary severity for the part that she had played. She would scarcely allow any excuse for her conduct at all.

"I ought to have known better," she would say to herself. "In my heart I did know better. I was simply carried away by my vanity. The captain flattered me, little fool that I was, and I was susceptible to his flattery. Now I am paying the penalty

of my pride and folly, and richly I deserve all the suffering that has come to me."

The captain made no attempt to see Kitty again. He knew very well what the result would be if he did.

Though he would have gladly, if he could, have got hold of her fortune—for his own was dwindling at a most alarming rate—he knew very well now that if he was to recoup himself by a rich marriage it would have to be in some other direction.

Moreover, while Mr. Bolitho was friendly with him when they met, there was a certain coldness in his manner that the captain was quick to notice, and quick also to resent.

At heart he despised all men who were engaged in commerce, and looked upon them as belonging to an inferior order.

Though unbounded wealth would atone for a great deal in his eyes, yet down at the bottom of his heart he had a profound reverence for blood and name, and of course the Carews belonged to one of the oldest families in the county.

Meanwhile Rex and Dorothy managed to spend a good deal of time in each other's company.

Dorothy had a mission to fulfil, and so welcomed Mr. Bolitho's son with a smile whenever he put in an appearance at the rectory.

She had no thought of anything else than winning

him over to the true fold. She believed that God had given her this work to do, and she was resolved to do it to the best of her ability.

For a while everything went as cheerfully as marriage-bells. She found that Rex was quite willing to listen to her when she talked of religious things, and when she extolled the good work the Church had done, and praised the many noble sons the Church had reared—when she referred to their scholarship, their piety and devotion—he acquiesced readily in all that she said, and even added words of his own in praise of the good they had accomplished.

She began to wonder after a while that he had remained outside so long. It was simply, she thought, the outcome of his environment. At heart he seemed at one with her and with all that was best in her religious life and work.

Dorothy, however, was a wise and cautious little maiden, and was careful not to push her advantage too far. Up to the present she had not attempted to attack his position; she had not assumed that he was in the wrong; she had not questioned him as to his own belief or his views on Church polity. When she changed her point of attack she discovered that the citadel was not so easily stormed as she had imagined. While she was content to praise her Church and extol its works everything was plain sailing, but when she

attempted to demolish his position, to criticise his beliefs, and to denounce his Church and creed as heretical, then she discovered that Rex had views and opinions of his own which were diametrically opposed to hers, and that he held them fast with a tenacity, not to say stubbornness, that was exceedingly disconcerting.

At first when she attempted the process of demolition he laughingly tried to parry her attacks.

"Let us not discuss these questions," he said. "What does it matter? Many men have many minds; we cannot all be shaped after the same pattern; it is not necessary that we should."

"But," protested Dorothy, "it is a matter of great importance. Between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between religion and superstition, there is a great gulf fixed."

"Truly," he answered, with a smile; "but who shall say what is right and what is wrong in such matters? Who shall determine what is truth and what is error? Doubtless in all our systems we have a measure of truth and also a measure of error. We cannot all agree on these little points. Why not let us agree to differ?"

"But it seems such a pity," she said, "that you who are so near the Kingdom should not come within."

"Then you think I am outside?" he said, laughingly.

"I am quite sure of it," she answered; "and you might be of so much use in the world if you came within the fold of the true Church."

"The true Church," he answered, "is composed of true people—men and women who do His will and imbibe His spirit. The name by which they are called is of little moment, in my judgment."

"Oh, don't!" she answered, with a look of alarm in her eyes. "It hurts me to hear you talk such rank heresy. Do you not feel that you are speaking what is not right?"

"I am afraid I do not, Miss Dorothy," he said, with a laugh. "But why let us pursue the question? I do not call in question the genuineness of your faith nor the rightness of your creed. And since charity is the greatest of all virtues, you will surely extend that charity to me?"

"It is not charity to condone what is wrong," she said. And then silence fell upon them for a while, and Rex adroitly changed the current of the conversation, and the old pleasant footing between them was once more established.

For many weeks after that Rex was very careful to avoid all controversial questions; but with Dorothy it was a matter of conscience, and the disputed points were bound to come up again sooner or later.

So time went on, marked by many a wordy warfare between them and by a steady growth of attachment. More than twelve months passed away; and then something happened—something that shook once more the little town of St. Mullion to its very foundations.

CHAPTER XVI

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

IT will now be necessary to the proper unfolding of this story that we retrace our steps to the day when Roger mysteriously disappeared. The last authentic tidings of him were that he had been seen by some men returning from their work walking in the Beaver Woods, along the banks of the Reagle River. Why he should be seen so far from home no one knew, unless he intended visiting his uncle at Stonehurst.

Such a visit, however, according to the captain's statement, was never paid. Had he been to Stonehurst it would most certainly have been known. So it turned out that to the working men he gave his last "Good night."

After that he was not seen again.

Of course, he was seen again; but those who saw him kept the matter to themselves. When Roger wandered away into Beaver Woods he had no intention of going anywhere in particular; he simply wanted to be alone.

Kitty's firm and absolute refusal to entertain his proposal had staggered him. He was prepared for difficulties and delays, he quite expected that she would put him off and ask for time ; but that she would send him away from her without a glimmer of hope was what he had scarcely calculated upon in his most despairing moments, and the shock almost stunned him.

As he wandered farther and farther away from Bewleigh he forgot all about time and distance, and took very little heed to the way he was going. He felt that to remain still in one place would be impossible ; he must do something, go somewhere. So he rambled on aimlessly, without purpose and almost without volition.

Growing tired at length, he leaned against a tree, and, taking a notebook from his pocket, he began to scribble a letter to Kitty in pencil. He resolved that he would face the inevitable, and that no one should hear him whine. But he would ask Kitty not to come to Bewleigh again. If he was to fight his battle with any hope of success it would be best that he should never see her. She might want to maintain their old friendly footing, and come across to Bewleigh as usual ; but, though that might be pleasant enough for her, for him it would be worse than torture.

“ No, no,” he said to himself, “ the old life must end.

To see her and be thrown into her company would only make me mad. I had better tell her straight she must not come to Bewleigh, and I will give up going to Trevisco, except when she is away. Rex and Stanley will wonder, of course, and so will Mr. and Mrs. Bolitho; but it's best to have a clear understanding and abide by it."

So he scribbled a long letter to Kitty in pencil, in which he told her frankly what was passing through his mind. He did not attempt to plead his cause again. He accepted her word as final, and bade her farewell.

Half an hour later, however, he thought better of it, and tore the letter into bits and threw it into the river. One fragment of it, however, was caught by the wind and carried back into the wood, and was found many hours later by those who came to search for him.

Looking up a little later, he was surprised to see Stonehurst clearly silhouetted against the sky. Indeed, he was scarcely a thousand yards from his uncle's house. Should he call? It was long past his dinner-hour, and he was beginning to feel faint and exhausted. His father would doubtless think that he had called at the Bolithos', and would not trouble himself in the least about him. For several minutes he stood perfectly still, wondering what he should do, and during those minutes the meshes of a cruel fate closed steadily round him.

The captain, as he rode home from Trevisco, saw him

wandering in the woods, but little guessed after what he had seen at Bewleigh that he was loitering by the river as Kitty's rejected lover. On the contrary, the captain was disposed to think that he had come away to enjoy his rapture alone—to see his visions and dream his dreams in the silence and shadow of the woods—and at the thought he ground his teeth in the bitterness of his jealousy and anger.

For a considerable distance the captain kept his eye on his nephew. He was astride a tall horse, and could easily look over the hedge; and down the long vistas of the wood he could see Roger, every now and then, walking slowly in the direction of Stonehurst. The captain slackened his pace to a walk, whilst an unpleasant look came into his eyes and darkened his face.

The possibility of removing Roger had occurred to him before; but to do it without attaching suspicion to himself had seemed almost an impossibility. No question of right or wrong troubled him. Anything was right so long as it served his own ends. If he could remove Roger from his path with the absolute certainty that he would not be found out, he would not hesitate a moment. Roger stood between him and all that he coveted most. And, morally, he knew no other law than that of the savage beast. Let the strongest and most cunning win.

"That's the law of the nations," he said to himself. "We don't hesitate to take one life or a thousand lives if they stand in the way of our advancement. I've shot down scores myself; and what's a life more or less? Bah! Our civil law, as we call it, is absolutely silly on the question. But, anyhow, it exists, and that ties my hands."

A little farther on he got a nearer view of Roger, with the evening glow shining on his face.

"By Cromwell!" he ejaculated; "he does not look much like a happy lover, at any rate. He might have buried his last friend. I wonder now——"

And he twisted himself round on his horse and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"I believe she's said 'no' to him—by Heaven I do!" And his face relaxed into a broad grin.

A moment later he knitted his brows again.

"I believe that's it," he muttered. "And suicide would be a very neat explanation, only nobody ever knew a Carew commit suicide. Still, the thing isn't impossible, and somebody is certain to see him wandering down here by the Reagle."

A minute or two later he had completely lost sight of his nephew, and, digging spurs into his horse, he galloped swiftly in the direction of Stonehurst.

"If the thing can be done it shall be done!" he muttered to himself. "And Jacob and Davy are equal

to anything, though I am rather afraid they will jib at this."

Davy met him on his arrival, and held the horse while he dismounted.

"Come into the house as soon as you have given her a feed," he said. "I want you very particularly."

"Yes, sir." And Davy made for the stables at once.

"They'll jib, no doubt," the captain muttered to himself; "but I have them both under my thumb. Besides, money will square them, and I'm flush in cash at present, thanks to that lucky sweepstake."

As soon as he got into the house, Jacob came to him.

"Sit down, Jacob, and listen to me," he said sharply, and Jacob instantly obeyed.

"There's a young man wandering just at present in Beaver Woods," he went on. "He seems in no hurry to get out of it. It's growing dusk now; it will be dark directly. I want you to keep your eye on him, you and Davy. If he sleeps to-night at the bottom of the Reagle you will have done your duty. Do you understand?"

Jacob glanced at his master with a startled expression in his dark, liquid eyes, and shook his head.

The next moment Davy entered, and the captain began again.

Davy caught at the proposal in a moment, but asked the practical question what figure the captain was prepared to name.

"Fifty pounds each," said the captain.

"Make it a hundred, an' we'll think about it," said Davy, slowly and doggedly.

"A hundred?" questioned the captain incredulously.

"Ay; not a farden less, as far as I'm concerned!"

"You're impertinent, Davy," said the captain angrily.
"Don't you know I could——"

"I know everything," Davy answered, in the same dogged way, "but this ain't a job I like; besides, we ain't in the Ingies now."

"I know that. Besides, it mustn't be attempted unless the way is absolutely clear. It must be a case of suicide or accidental drowning. No violence, you understand. No wounds or bruises."

"I'm afraid you're asking too much," Davy said, after a pause. "Hundred pounds each for such a job ain't half enough."

During the conversation Jacob had kept absolutely silent, but at this point he rose from his chair and stole towards the window with the tread of a cat.

"Is that him away yonder?" he asked, pointing to an opening between the trees.

"The very same," said the captain, coming and standing by his side.

"He is——"

"Never mind who he is, fool! You have to do what I tell you, and ask no questions."

Jacob's eyes contracted, and a curious smile stole over his swarthy features.

"Half of the money down now, and the rest when the job's done!" broke in Davy at this point.

"By Jove! there'll never be such an opportunity again," thought the captain. "And what's two hundred pounds in comparison with the Bewleigh estates?"

"Go and fetch round my horse," he said aloud, "while I go upstairs and get the money. I must ride to St. Mullion again, and at once."

When the captain and Davy had both left the room, Jacob went again to the window. The moving figure between the trees was drawing slowly nearer the house.

"Me not like this," he muttered to himself, his dusky eyebrows contracting. "And the water it be very cold!" And he shuddered visibly. "Oh! I do not like this country," he went on; "but he made me come, and he do hold me fast."

What the hold was that the captain had upon him no one, however, knew but himself and his master, unless Davy was in the secret. But Davy could be as silent as the grave when he liked.

All unconscious of the plot that was being hatched,

Roger drew slowly nearer his uncle's house. He had no suspicion of danger, and there was no voice to warn him. Had he deliberately chosen to put himself into the hands of his enemy he could not have done so more effectually. Every step he took rendered the working out of the plot more easy. But danger was the last thing in the world that would occur to him. Though in his heart he had no profound reverence or respect for his uncle, it never once occurred to him that the Captain would be glad to have him out of the way, much less that he would plot and scheme for such an end.

Roger was so genuinely honest and transparent himself that he was in danger of measuring everybody else by his own high standard. He had been brought up in the atmosphere of simple genuine piety, and though there was nothing of the prig about him, there was no mistaking the trend of his thought and life. He was trying to fight his battle now on the high ground of faith and chivalry, and though he was nearer to the point of despair than he had ever been before in his life, he was not the man to yield weakly. His courage would live even though the light of his faith went out entirely.

By the time Davy had brought round the captain's horse to the door the money was counted out on the table—fifty pounds in gold, the remaining fifty in notes.

"And if we complete it without hitch," Davy questioned, coming into the room, "two fifties more to-morrow?"

"As soon as I am absolutely certain that the thing has been done, another hundred pounds shall be yours. Now, what do you say, Jacob? for you have been detestably quiet all the time."

"What the master do command, that I do," he answered, with half-closed eyes.

"And if you attempt to play me any tricks, then, by the grave of all my ancestors, I'll—I'll——"

"Jacob do not say much, but he do act," the Oriental interposed, with a smile.

"Is he still down there in the woods?"

"He was there a few minutes ago."

"So much the better; the young fool is deliberately putting himself into your hands, and Providence does not seem inclined to step in and prevent it."

The Oriental smiled, but said nothing. Davy was busy counting the money.

"Now understand me," said the captain, putting in a last word, "there must be no attempt unless the way is absolutely clear. The least bungling, and the game would be up; but I think I can trust you both. You have not failed me in the past, nor have I failed you. If the way is clear to-night, then to-night let it be. If not—next week, next month, next year! You

understand—he has to sleep at the bottom of the river?"

A minute later the captain had mounted his horse and was galloping away in the direction of Trevisco, where he arrived in good time and in most excellent spirits.

"It won't be a pleasant job," Davy said to his companion, as soon as the sound of the horse's feet had died in the distance; "so you had better get out of the cellar something stronger than water, for we shall need priming—both of us."

"We've no time for that," Jacob said. "What we do must be done quickly, or our chance may be gone."

"Caan't help it," said Davy doggedly. "I caan't put no heart into a job like this unless I'm primed."

"And while you be priming, as you call it, the bird may have flown."

"Shaan't be sorry if he has," Davy answered. "He's as much right to live as we have."

"But you have taken the money."

"Which we'll keep, and the governor's secret also."

The Oriental half closed his eyes and smiled. He did not yet understand British methods or British character, and as far as he had seen them he loved neither.

When Davy had half emptied a decanter he announced himself as ready.

"But how are we to act? What plan have you?" Jacob inquired.

"First catch 'im," said Davy, with a laugh. "Then tie something over his mouth to keep him from squealing; then in he goes."

"But he can swim like a duck."

"Then we must tie his hands."

"And when the body is found?" questioned Jacob.

"You've more sense than I thought you had," said Davy, with a grin. "The truth is we shall have to take him into the river and hold him under water until he's quiet."

The Oriental shuddered.

"There's no other way. But look, there's the young fool standing there at the head of the creek!"

"But the water is ten—twenty feet deep there."

"I know it. We shall have to carry him farther down, where 'tis shallow."

Roger had just decided that he would not call at Stonehurst, and was turning on his heel to retrace his steps, when the two men came upon him, one on each side. He saw Davy first, and advanced to meet him, while Jacob, with the tread of a panther, came softly up behind, caught him round the waist and flung him upon the ground. Before he had time to cry out, or even to comprehend what had happened, his arms and legs were

securely pinioned, a big handkerchief was stuffed into his mouth, and he found himself utterly helpless.

He struggled violently to be free, but he felt as though he were in a vice. The next moment the Oriental caught him up in his arms as though he were an infant, and bore him swiftly away along the bank of the river.

CHAPTER XVII

WITHIN THE TOWER

DAVY ran a little way in front to see that the way was clear. He made no attempt to help in carrying Roger; he left that to his companion. Jacob was as strong as a lion, and almost as nimble. Davy had not gone many yards, however, when he stopped suddenly and held up his finger; then, turning round, he saw that his companion had struck off at right angles and was making his way rapidly towards Stonehurst.

Whether Jacob was moved by the impulse of fear, or of humanity, he hardly knew himself. He realised that the enterprise in which he was engaged was exceedingly dangerous. The daylight had yet not all faded from the sky; and in a wood where people wandered, and through which there were a number of footpaths, to carry out the plan on which they had entered involved considerable risk; hence he rushed off in the direction of the house, and was soon lost among the ruins of the old Abbey.

Davy stood and watched him with a feeling of wonder in his heart.

"What is the fellow up to?" he said to himself. "Those Injins are mighty cute in the main. I wonder if he's heard something or seen something?"

He did not wait long, however. From a distant part of the wood came the faint hum of voices, and soon after several people loomed dimly in sight far away between the trees. Davy instantly turned his back upon the Reagle, and struck off in the direction of Stonehurst.

On reaching the broken walls of the Abbey he loitered for some time in the shadow, expecting Jacob to appear. Jacob, however, had completely vanished. What he had done with Roger was a question that Davy was unable to answer. After remaining some time, he moved away in the direction of the stables, and, pulling off his coat, set to work leisurely to polish up the harness and brasses. Ten minutes later Jacob came silently into the harness-room, and quietly shut the door.

"Well," said Davy, looking up, "what is the next move?"

"We must wait till all the daylight is gone," the Oriental answered; "wait till after midnight. There will be no people walking about then. We do run great risk."

"I know that," Davy answered. "It's a job I don't like, and I wish it was safely off our hands."

"I like it not, either," said the other. "But we have been paid, and the master is cruel, and demands obedience."

"You do not like him?" questioned Davy.

"I be afraid of him," was the reply. "I like not this country, nor the ways of the people."

"But what have you done with the young squire?"
Davy asked.

"I have lodged him in the tower," was the reply.
"There he sits, wondering and waiting. I have told
him that he must die soon after midnight."

"Ah! And how does he take it?"

"He is quite calm and composed. He can only die once," he says, "though he would prefer dying in the open fields or in some brave encounter. He says that it is humiliating to be drowned like a rat in a hole."

"And does he know what's at the bottom of the business?"

"I think so. He sees with clear eyes, though he mentions no names."

"And you have taken the cords from his hands and legs?"

"Yes, he has freedom within the bounds of the tower. I also have taken him food and wine; also a mattress have I carried, that he may rest himself."

"You are kind, Jacob," said the other cynically. "If the master knows, you will be getting into trouble."

"But he will not know," was the reply. "He never goes near the place. He hates those passages down in the darkness. We might keep the young man there a year, and the master never know."

"But we shall do nothing so silly," was the reply. "The sooner we get him off our hands the better. You did right in running away with him, for if we had attempted smothering him in the water we should have been caught in the act."

"I knew what I was about," Jacob answered, half closing his dark eyes. "I am not clever, but I am watchful. Now, good evening; I will come to you again when the clock strikes two. All people will be asleep then, and we can do our work undisturbed." And, opening the door, he stole away as silently as he came.

Davy picked up the piece of harness that he had dropped and began rubbing at it as before. But it was evident that his mind was engaged in other things. At length he muttered to himself—

"I hate this job. It's cowardly drowning people in cold blood. It is difficult, too, for there must be no mark upon him. I wish the captain 'ud do his dirty work himself."

Meanwhile Roger was lying on the mattress that Jacob had provided him with, staring into the darkness. He was scarcely able yet to realise what had happened.

As the minutes passed away, however, and lengthened into hours, his mind became more clear, and he was able to take in without difficulty the whole situation. At first it seemed too terrible to believe. It was not his own fate that troubled him so much; but the thought of his uncle's treachery filled him with consternation.

As we have said before, he had no great reverence for his uncle; and his father had always spoken of him as a reckless and daring individual. Nevertheless, he did not imagine for a moment that he was capable of so much wickedness. That a Carew would incite to murder brought a flush of shame to his cheek. He knew, of course, that the captain was always short of cash. That he should covet the Bewleigh estates was, perhaps, not unnatural, but that he should descend to a crime so foul and cowardly in order to accomplish his end seemed too terrible to be believed.

But as he continued to reflect, the truth forced itself upon his mind with such conviction that he was no longer able to resist it. He saw how the whole scheme would work out. He had wandered away into the woods after his conversation with Kitty. It would be

known, of course, as time passed on, that Kitty had rejected him. Jacob had told him that he was to sleep that night at the bottom of the river. The inference would be, of course, that, depressed and broken-hearted by Kitty's refusal, he had committed suicide. His body would be found, and instantly recognised. The shock very likely would kill his father, and the captain would at once come into possession of the estates, and would be known in future as Sir Francis Carew.

But desperate as was his condition, he did not entirely give up hope. What youth ever yields himself wholly to despair? He knew, of course, that his captors were two to one; that Jacob himself had the strength of three; that in any physical encounter he was sure to be worsted. Still, he was not dead yet. While there was life there was hope.

Then he began to think of Kitty, and for a while his heart softened and tears came into his eyes. Kitty had been the sweet dream of his life, his never-failing inspiration. In all his studies and examinations he had thought of her, and when he won he rejoiced because she would know and appreciate his labour. But since she would never be his, and would probably give her heart to another; since her fancy was for a man of action rather than for a man of thought; since she preferred the red coat of the battlefield to the black

coat of the study—why, what did it matter what became of him ?

Could it be possible, he wondered—and for the first time almost the thought flashed across his mind—that she was giving her affections to the captain ? He knew that his uncle constantly visited Trevisco, and that Kitty gave him a kindly welcome. He had often heard her extol his deeds of daring, his splendid heroism, and had seen her eyes sparkle when she spoke of him. But up to now he had never thought of her loving him, for he was old enough to be her father.

Now, however, as in a flash, it came back to him. Perhaps the captain had been captivated by her beauty ; perhaps he imagined that he (Roger) was his rival ; perhaps he had a double motive in getting him out of the way.

So, bit by bit, the truth unfolded itself and made itself clear to his mind. Link by link the chain of evidence seemed to lengthen—one thing naturally grew out of another. He could piece the bits of evidence together until they formed a complete and perfect whole.

He wondered that no suspicion of the truth had ever crossed his mind before—wondered that his love for Kitty had never been touched by jealousy, wondered that he had never interpreted aright the sparkle in her eyes when the captain's name was mentioned.

It was all clear enough to him now. The captain wanted to marry Kitty, wanted to possess the Bewleigh estates ; he was the only obstacle in his path. To have him removed in a manner that would not excite suspicion was his object, and he appeared likely to carry out his purpose.

By morning he would be lying dead at the bottom of the river, and in a few months Kitty would be the mistress of Bewleigh, and he would be forgotten. And as he thought of all this he groaned audibly, and felt scarcely sorry that he was so soon to be out of it all.

When the clock struck two Jacob noiselessly left the house and stole across to the stables. Lifting the latch silently, he entered, and found Davy seated in the harness-room.

"I have come," said the Oriental.

"So I see," Davy answered, with a yawn. "But is it cold outside, that thou art shivering so?"

"I like not the task," the other answered ; "it is the work of a coward."

"A few more jobs of the kind," Davy replied, "and thy complexion would be that of a Christian. Why, man, thou art almost white!"

"I do not feel well," the Oriental answered ; "and I want this business done, and done quickly."

"I am at your service," Davy answered. "I am as

eager to get the job over as thou art. Now lead the way." Jacob at once opened the door, and Davy followed him out into the open air. For a while they stood still and listened, and the Oriental's quick ear caught the sound of voices.

"Why," he whispered, "there are people in the wood at this late hour."

"Call two in the morning late?" said Davy, with a low laugh.

"Late or early," was the reply, "there are people there. Ay, and they have lights also."

Davy pulled off his hat and scratched his head.

"We are too late," he said, "we have left the matter too long. They are searching for the squire, that is clear."

"Then what are we to do?" Jacob questioned.

"We must wait until to-morrow night," was the answer. "We must consider our own necks—that is the first thing."

"But this waiting upsets me," said the Oriental. "I do think about it all the time. I picture it when I am alone. I want the deed done; it is getting on my spirits, as you say. I cannot be cheerful while this thing is hanging over me."

"Thou art a curious mixture of strength and feebleness," said Davy, with a broad smile. "What is the use of imagining? It will be time enough to feel

the creeps when we stand in the water, and he at the bottom."

"Hush—hush!" said Jacob. "There may be people about listening."

"There can be no one about but the old woman," said Davy, "and she could not hear a cannon go off."

"But the master?" questioned the Oriental. "He has not come into the house yet. I have waited up for him, but he has not returned."

"Oh, he is down with the others in the wood, you may depend," Davy said. "He is taking part in the search. Just like him. He will profess great interest and great anxiety, and all the while will be laughing up his sleeve. Oh, I admire those cunning, selfish men who pay other people to do the disagreeables while they get all the profit!"

"Then we can do nothing to-night?" the Oriental inquired in a whisper.

"Nothing!" Davy answered. "Go home and go to bed, and I will do the same." And he strolled back again to his room above the coach-house.

The Oriental, however, instead of entering the house, turned aside and threaded his way amongst the ruins of the old abbey. He descended several steps, until he reached a thick oaken door. This he opened, and closed behind him. For a few minutes he waited in total darkness, until he was able to get a light. Then, holding

the candle in his hand, he marched forward along a narrow passage until he reached another heavy door. Into the keyhole of this he inserted a large key, then slowly pushed it open and cautiously entered, and as cautiously closed the door behind him. The feeble ray from the candle just made the darkness visible. It was a large, circular room. On the far side, stretched on a mattress, lay Roger; but at sight of the Oriental he sat up and stared at him.

"Well?" he questioned. "Have you come to execute your mission?"

"No," Jacob replied. "I have come to say that you must wait."

"Then I am not to be drowned to-night?"

"Unfortunately that is impossible. There are many people all along the banks of the river searching for you."

For a moment Roger hid his face in his hands. Then he looked up at the Oriental, and said—

"I do not care so much for myself—it is of my father I think. How terribly distressed he will be!"

"It will be painful for him," said the Oriental; "but he will get over it."

"I fear it will kill him," Roger answered, "for the doctor always dreaded any violent shock."

"Sorrow kills not, nor joy," said the Oriental; "it is anxiety and waiting that wear us out."

"You speak like a sage," Roger said, with a cynical

smile. "Will you not sit down and let us talk together—it would help to pass the time away?"

"I wish not to get to like you," said the Oriental; "you have a kind face, and the task that I have to accomplish is painful."

"But why kill me at all?" Roger questioned. "Why not let me live, even if I lived a prisoner?"

"That would be difficult," Jacob answered, knitting his brows and half closing his eyes. "You would want constant watching. There would always be a sense of danger—a fear of discovery. If the captain knew, he would kill me at once—and without mercy."

"But why do you serve my uncle in this way? What hold has he upon you?"

"Ah! that I cannot tell," was the reply. "That is a secret between ourselves."

"But surely service should stop short of murder?"

But to this Jacob made no reply. For some moments he stood quite still; then, turning again to the door, he said—

"I will bring you a ladder, by which you can reach the next floor. It will be less cold than this. I will also bring you something to keep you warm during the night. You may have to stay here several days; I know not."

And, pulling open the door, he disappeared, and the heavy door fell to with a thud behind him.

Roger felt considerably more hopeful after this interview. He saw very well that while searchers kept wandering up and down the banks of the river his gaolers would not be able to carry their plans into execution. Moreover, it was not impossible to work on Jacob's feelings. He might be an Oriental, but he was not without heart. Also he was superstitious, and it might not be difficult to work upon his fears in such a way that he would hesitate to carry out his designs. And to gain time just now might be no small matter, and in the end might mean release.

Half an hour later Jacob returned, bringing a ladder of some ten or twelve feet in length. This he pushed into the room, and told Roger to erect it against the wall near the opening in the floor. He also brought some candles and a box of lucifer-matches, which he laid carefully near at hand. He refused, however, to hold any conversation with Roger during this visit. Perhaps he felt that the less he said to the prisoner the easier might prove his task.

Roger tried his best to induce him to stay, but without success. A few minutes later he heard the key turned in the lock, and the steps of his gaoler dying away along the distant corridor.

Taking the candle which Jacob had lighted for him, he placed it on the floor in the middle of the room; then, raising the ladder against the wall so that its top

came close to the opening in the floor above, he seized the light and climbed nimbly up the steps. Here he found a room of the same dimensions as the one he had left; but having a wooden floor, it felt less damp and chilly.

Walking carefully around it, he examined the walls and floor. The room was without window, door, or chimney, or any visible means of ventilation. He knew, however, that it must be ventilated by some means, for the air was quite pure. Then he raised his candle and examined the next floor above him. That seemed to be built of solid oak; but he could discover no opening in it anywhere. He knew very well that there must be rooms above, for the tower was a fairly lofty one; but evidently they were not approached from the room he now occupied.

His next business was to descend to the bottom room and drag up the mattress that Jacob had brought him, and also a ragged quilt, which he might need to keep him warm—for, though it was summer time, the air in this tower was exceedingly chilly. Looking at his watch, he discovered that it was nearly four o'clock in the morning; so, pulling off his coat and boots, he lay down on the mattress, and wrapped the quilt about him.

"I may as well make myself as comfortable as possible," he said, "and even try to get a little sleep. I have a few hours' respite, at any rate; nothing will be

gained by brooding. I may as well make the best of my position, and draw what comfort I can from the fact that no attempt will be made upon my life until to-morrow night."

It was late in the morning when the captain returned to Stonehurst, for he had spent the night in Beaver Woods with the searchers. He looked tired and worn out, but was evidently in a very good humour with himself and the world generally.

"Well, Jacob," he said to his faithful servant, "you have carried out my instructions?"

"We have, master," was the quick reply.

"And had you any difficulty?"

"No difficulty at all."

"And no one saw you?"

"Not a soul, sir."

"That is right; the body, of course, will come to the surface in a few days?"

"Unless it be carried out by the current into the sea."

"That must be prevented if possible. I am anxious that the body should be recovered and decently buried."

"We can prevent nothing that has been done," said Jacob, and turned away.

Later in the day, Davy, who was not troubled with nerves or imagination, approached the captain and requested that the balance of the money should be paid;

but the captain refused until the body had been recovered and identified.

"When that has been done," he said, "the money shall be yours. I am a man of my word."

Davy protested that that was not a part of the bargain, but the captain contended that it was.

"We are not responsible," said Davy, "for what becomes of the body when it gets to the bottom of the river."

"And I am not responsible for the money," said the captain, "until I have proof that you have done the work."

Later in the day Davy met the Oriental.

"Look here, Jacob," he said, "we shall never get the rest of the money until we've completed the business. I suggest that we finish the job to-night."

Jacob looked at Davy for a moment in silence, then bowed his head in assent.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOPE AND DESPAIR

ROGER slept for several hours, and when he awoke he was still in darkness. For a moment or two he wondered where he was and what had happened. Then, as in a flash, everything came back to him. He did not attempt to get up. He could do nothing if he did. He might as well lie still and think.

His brain was quick to take in all the possibilities of the situation. His gaolers had not drowned him because they could not do so with safety ; and as long as the woods and river-banks were in possession of the searchers he was comparatively safe from that form of death, at any rate. But would some other method be adopted to dispose of him ? He saw clearly enough that his uncle wanted to convey the idea that he had committed suicide. If his body was found in the river without any marks of violence upon it the inference would be clear. If he were despatched by any other method murder would be suggested at once, and that

would mean inquiry, and inquiry might lead to the exposure of the whole wicked and cowardly plot.

On the other hand, if he were murdered and buried under the floor of the tower, his friends might think that he had fallen into the river and had been swept out to sea by the current ; and, unless those who committed the crime confessed, the secret might never be unearthed to the end of time.

He grew hot and cold by turns as these thoughts passed through his mind, and the more he reflected the less hopeful his position seemed to grow.

That his gaolers would not set him at liberty was a foregone conclusion. Having carried out their intention so far, their very safety would depend on their completing it. There were many ways of killing a man, and if one failed another could be easily adopted. So strongly did this view press itself upon his mind that hope at length died out of his heart altogether, and he tried to resign himself to his fate.

There was nothing of the coward about Roger. Moreover, his simple faith in the mercy of God and in the merits of His Son Jesus Christ was more than light to him in his darkness—it was comfort and strength and peace.

He got up at length and knelt on his mattress and prayed, commanding his soul to the love that is infinite and to the mercy that never fails, and as he prayed

despondency and depression seemed to roll away from his mind like a cloud. He could only die once, and death he believed was the beginning of a better and nobler life. In a few days, perhaps a few hours, he would be free from the worry and heartache, his battle fought, his victory won. And if what remained of his earthly life was to be spent in that dark prison he would hail the blow, or the stab, or the river that should set him free.

How long he remained upon his knees he did not know, for he had lost all count of time. But after a while he stretched himself on the mattress again, and began to think of others who had endured a much worse fate than his own with songs and rejoicing. The martyrs were not only imprisoned, they were tortured—stretched upon the rack—and even flayed alive.

It is true that they died in a noble cause, and knew in their imprisonment that they were winning freedom for others, while he was being murdered to gratify the selfishness and ambition of one selfish man. Nevertheless, the God that sustained them could sustain him, and though no good would be wrought by his death, no bright example set to others, still it was not the privilege of all to die for a noble cause. He must be content with a less glorious fate.

Then his thoughts went back to his father and to Kitty; but he put the latter out of his mind as quickly

as he could. Kitty, of course, would regret his death and shed a few sorrowful tears over the fate of her companion; but she would soon forget him, and perhaps find his absence a relief.

Perhaps she would marry the captain—and he writhed a little at the thought. To think of Kitty, who had been so long his ideal of all womanly grace and purity, marrying a *roué* and a murderer was as the bitterness of death to him. But he faced the situation with a courage that did him credit.

"If she prefers a man old enough to be her father," he said to himself—"a man with a doubtful and shady past, if she can take to her heart a man whose eyes tell tales, then she is not all that I have imagined her, and we were not meant for each other."

But when he reflected on his father's sorrow and distress, his eyes filled with tears.

"I know it will kill him!" he said to himself. "He has built all his hopes upon me, and I have been his all. Ah, well! perhaps we shall sooner meet in the better country."

And a rapt and wistful expression came into his eyes, and the darkness of his prison seemed to melt and vanish, and beyond the cold stone walls he saw stretching fair fields of light and beauty, and in the throng of happy people he saw his father with no shadow of care or sorrow upon his brow.

Then the vision suddenly faded, for a sound of footsteps floated up from the room below, and a light shone through the opening in the floor. He was on his feet in a moment, and, looking down, he saw the Oriental, who had brought him something to eat.

But though he called to Jacob he got no answer. The Oriental did not want to be inveigled into a conversation again. As soon as he had laid down the food he disappeared, locking the door behind him, and Roger found himself again in darkness.

That, however, did not trouble him, as he had matches and candle of his own. So, getting a light, he put on his boots and coat, and then descended to the lower room, where he found an ample and even appetising meal awaiting him.

When he had appeased his hunger he felt stronger and more desirous of life. Indeed, he began to feel that a spirit of resignation did not become him under the circumstances. Life was God's gift, and he had no right to give it up lightly. Nay, it was his duty to prevent his uncle and his tools committing a crime, if possible.

So, taking his candle, he began to examine carefully the walls of his dungeon. But he soon satisfied himself that no hope of escape lay in that direction. Then he directed attention to the door. It was of solid oak, black with age, and studded with square-headed nails.

"I might as well hope to dig through the walls with my nails as batter down this door," he said to himself with a sigh. "I fear my hope of escape is a very poor one."

For the best part of an hour he examined both rooms very carefully, then he sat down on his mattress again, and began to think out another plan.

Jacob came alone to see him. Would it be possible to stun him by a blow directly he entered, and so overpower him, and escape that way? He knew that in any encounter, on equal terms, Jacob was more than a match for him. If he was to be victor, he must catch the Oriental while off his guard. Under ordinary circumstances, to attack a man by stealth, or from behind a hedge, would be deemed a cowardly thing. But his circumstances were not ordinary. A man was at liberty to kill another in self-defence.

But what had he to attack him with? Jacob had brought him food, but he had been careful to bring neither knife nor fork, nor, indeed, anything else that could be used as a weapon. He had only his fist, and that was but a poor weapon at best.

He decided after a while that he would wait in the lower room and mark carefully Jacob's method of entrance. So he crouched near the door hour after hour in the darkness until he was cramped and cold. He began to conclude that Jacob would visit him no

more that day. He listened intently, but he could hear no sound. The place was as silent and as cold as a tomb.

Suddenly, however, when he had given up expecting his gaoler, Jacob stood before him, and the light of his candle flared in his eyes and almost blinded him.

"Why do you sit by the door?" Jacob asked suspiciously.

"It seems nearer the outside world," Roger answered, after a moment of hesitation.

"You cannot harm me," Jacob answered, as if he guessed his intention; "and I might bring you no more food."

"How much longer have I to live?" Roger asked.

"I think not many days," was the candid reply.

"And will nothing induce you to let me escape?"

The Oriental shook his head.

"We have gone too far now. What would become of us?"

"But if I gave my promise——"

"Oh, I like not the promises of the people of this country," Jacob interposed.

"But I am a Christian."

"Ah, so is the captain. I have seen many Christians in my country. No, no!"

And he laughed a low, chuckling laugh.

"No, the captain is not a Christian!" Roger answered warmly. "A Christian will do no wrong to another; he will not lie or cheat or steal. He will speak the truth and love his neighbour."

The Oriental laughed again.

"I have seen too many," he answered. "They steal your country, and shoot your people, and make servants of those who live."

"But you will profit by it in the end!" Roger declared. "You will have better laws and wiser rulers, and more liberty and greater prosperity."

"Bah!"

And the Oriental spat indignantly on the ground.

"Then you will not trust me?" said Roger.

"I trust no one," was the reply; "that I learned from your Christian uncle. But I speak the truth myself. I have told you why we have brought you here."

"You have been very candid, certainly," Roger said, with a smile, "and I thank you for attending to my wants. But are you not afraid to kill me?"

"Why should I be? My own people have been killed—ah, many of them!"

"To kill in battle is a very different thing, but murder in cold blood is cowardly."

"I know that, and I do not like to do it; but it must be done."

"But why 'must'?"

The Oriental shrugged his shoulders and smiled pityingly.

"The captain must be obeyed," he answered at length.

"You serve him with a strange devotion," Roger said. "I do not understand your loving him so."

"Me love him?"—and he spat on the ground again. "But fear—ah, that makes us slaves and cowards!"

"But you do not fear me?"

The Oriental smiled again.

"You can do no harm," he said.

"But if you kill me, cannot the dead come back?"

"You will not come back," was the quick reply. "Only the tortured souls come back. You will have peace."

"Do not be too sure on that point," Roger said sternly.

"You try to make me fear," Jacob answered. "You cannot do that. Do not hope. It is not kind to let you hope. I will be kind to you and tell you all. You will see the daylight no more. I am sorry for you, but so it must be."

And before Roger was aware he had disappeared, and the door had closed with a click behind him.

During the next two days Roger racked his brains to the utmost to discover some means of escape, but every

hour as it passed away took something out of his hope. Jacob kept him well supplied with food, and even with candles, while his bed was not so comfortless but he could sleep fairly soundly. And, indeed, he slept as much as he possibly could. For sometimes in his sleep he had pleasant dreams, and Kitty kept him company, and in her eyes shone the light of love, and he felt the touch of her own sweet lips upon his own, and heard her confess that she loved him, and that she would be his for ever and ever.

Yet such happy dreams added to his depression when he awoke.

"Dreams always go by the rule of contrary," he would say sadly. "Kitty does not love me, and I shall soon be forgotten."

He was fast asleep one night, for it was after midnight, and while he slept he dreamed that he was wandering with his father across Bewleigh Park, and as they walked they saw Kitty coming to meet them. Her eyes were beaming with pleasure, and her face was aglow with smiles.

"Oh, I have such a piece of good news for you!" she said as she drew near. And her voice rang out like music.

"What is it, Kitty?" he asked eagerly.

"What is it?" cried another voice. "Come, wake up at once!"

In a moment the dream vanished, and, opening his eyes, he saw Davy and Jacob bending over him.

"Come, wake up!" said Davy, "and take off them clothes you've got on. Fancy a gentleman going to bed in his clothes!"

"What do you mean?" Roger asked in reply.

"I mean what I say. We want your clothes—all of 'em, and be quick about it. No, don't move anything from the pockets."

Roger obeyed, scarcely knowing what he was doing.

"We've brought some others to take their place," Davy said, with a laugh. "Quite an assortment; and when you're arrayed in 'em you'll think of Solomon."

Roger was scarcely awake when he found himself quite alone again; and, indeed, he was much too sleepy to worry himself as to the why or wherefore his gaolers wanted his clothes.

It was not until several hours later that he took the trouble to examine the miscellaneous assortment of garments that had been brought to him.

"Perhaps it will turn out to my advantage," he said to himself, with a faint smile. "I hope it may."

It was well that hope rose in his heart like an unfailing spring, for he little guessed the fate that was in store for him.

CHAPTER XIX

BLACK TREACHERY

IT was the evening after the funeral. All St. Mullion believed that Roger Carew had been laid to rest in the tomb of his ancestors, and the little town was in its saddest mood in consequence.

At Stonehurst Davy and Jacob were discussing the situation with great animation in the seclusion of the harness-room. Their little scheme had proved an unqualified success.

The body found in the river had been identified as Roger's. The coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of "Found drowned," the balance of blood-money had been paid over by the captain, and from first to last not a breath of suspicion had been aroused in any direction.

The only disquieting feature of the whole case was, they had still Roger on their hands. This Davy declared was entirely the fault of the Oriental.

He admitted that to have drowned Roger without leaving any marks upon him would have been very

difficult. They would have had to wade with him into the river, and hold him under the water until he was drowned—a most unpleasant task, and a very risky one, no doubt, while so many people were constantly on the look-out along the river's bank. Still, his contention was that they could have done it right enough.

But Jacob was too cautious or too afraid. Whenever the time came for carrying out the plan, he drew back. It was he who suggested substituting young Lowry's body, and it was mainly his money that paid the old man.

Now, however, rose the question : what was to be done with the real Roger ? To keep him alive would be a constant source of trouble. Moreover, they were not tied down to any one method of disposing of him. They might starve him to death, or poison him, or put a bullet through his head. That he was to be got out of the way by some method was absolutely certain. But how, or when ? These were the questions that were exercising the minds of the two men as they sat together in the harness-room.

Davy talked bluntly and brutally ; but at heart he as much shrank from the task as the Oriental. Jacob was sensitive and superstitious. He feared that Roger might haunt him after he was dead.

So neither of the men could hit upon a plan that was entirely satisfactory. Jacob had not seen his

prisoner now for several days. Roger's calm and patient manner, his unyielding fortitude, his quiet heroism, seemed to take all the nerve out of the Oriental. He confessed to Davy that if he saw much of Roger he would never be able to consent to his death at all.

"And yesterday, when I went quietly into his room," he went on, "I heard him in the room above talking to his God."

"Praying, was he?" Davy questioned, with a laugh.

"Yes, he was praying! And he was asking God to forgive you and me, and particular to forgive his uncle. He said poor Davy and Jacob not know no better, but the captain he was very wicked, and he need much forgiveness."

"Not far wrong there, eh?" Davy remarked, with a leer.

"It did hurt me very much," Jacob went on. "If all Christians were like him, ah! I should not hate them at all. He is very noble, is the young squire, and it seems not right to me that the good should die and the bad live."

"Oh, dry up, Jacob," said the other. "I hate sich pious prating. Thee and I must do what we are paid for, and jolly well we've been paid, too."

"I know it must be done," said the Oriental, with a sigh. "But how? I cannot go and look into his

eyes and do it. His great kind eyes do follow me now. I wish I had not seen him!"

"Thou art a big fool, Jacob," Davy said savagely.

"We be big fools both," the Oriental replied with energy.

"And if we don't settle this business soon we shall have to pay for our folly."

"Then you settle it in your own way. You do not mind. You have not any feelings."

Davy made use of an epithet which we will not record, and then reflected some time in silence.

"Ain't there an old well somewhere that we could drop him into?" he asked at length.

"Would you do it?" Jacob questioned, with a little start.

"It would save a heap of trouble," was the reply. "It would be death and burial at the same time. Do you know of such a place?"

"I do."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then where is it?"

"You know the long passage that leads to the tower?"

"Of course I do."

"About half-way between the two doors there is a great square stone with a ring of iron in it."

"I noticed the ring the other night."

"Well, it covers a deep pit."

"You are sure?"

"I lifted it a long time ago to see."

"I wonder what there is about this old show that thy peering eyes haven't seen?" Davy questioned, with a laugh.

The Oriental smiled, showing two rows of exceedingly white teeth.

"We'd better do the business to-night," Davy said at length. "I shall never be able to sleep quite soundly till he's out of the way. Besides, the longer we delay the softer thy heart gets."

"You will do it yourself?" Jacob questioned.

"We must do it between us," was the reply.

Jacob shook his head. "I'd rather not see it done," he remarked, after a long pause.

"We can let him walk into it," said Davy, "and then neither of us need see."

"How?"

"Remove the stone, then open the door, and tell him that we've agreed to set him at liberty."

"Ah, he will suspect treachery. Those large eyes of his can see far."

"If he does, we must throw him in by force, that is all."

The Oriental shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

After a while Davy rose to his feet.

"Look you here, Jacob," he said; "we've delayed this business quite long enough—much too long, in my opinion! For my own part, I ain't going to wait no longer. I'm going to have it settled, and to-night. That young cub has to be polished off, and without any further loss of time!"

"As you will," Jacob answered, with a little shudder.

"Then lead the way to this old well, and we'll have the cover off in a jiffy."

A few minutes later they stole stealthily out of the stables, and quickly disappeared among the ruins of the old abbey. Descending a flight of steps, they passed the first door, and quickly closed it behind them. Then, lighting their candles, they crept noiselessly along the passage until they came to a big square flag with an iron ring in it.

Placing a crowbar through the ring, they easily lifted it out of its position, revealing as they did so the dark, clammy depths of a disused well.

"Splendid!" ejaculated Davy, in a whisper. "The very thing; might have been dug a-purpose."

"You will go and talk to him?" questioned Jacob. "I want not to see him any more."

"Oh, ay! I'll talk to him. But you must be at the other end of the passage to stop him if he should happen to jump over the well."

"That is not likely ; the mouth is wide."

"All the same, we must be prepared for accidents," was the reply. And he dropped a stone into the well, and listened to its plunge into the black, icy water with an air of satisfaction.

"It is deep and cold," Jacob remarked.

"He'll sleep quietly enough at the bottom," was the reply. "Now hand me the key, and I'll go and prepare him for freedom."

Meanwhile, Roger was seated on his mattress, staring vacantly into the semi-darkness, for there was a lighted candle on the floor near him. He had reached that state, however, when thinking becomes a difficulty.

Since his watch had been taken from him he had lost all count of time, and day and night were the same to him. He was conscious also that he had lost in large measure the power to think and feel. He spent most of his time lying down waiting in a dumb, listless way for nothing in particular. He was quite sure that if he lay there long enough in the darkness and silence he would lose his reason. Even now it was a trouble to think. It seemed years ago since that day when he sat with Kitty under the acacia-tree, and she told him she could not be his wife. He wondered in a listless way where she was now, and if she had forgotten him.

He was no longer in terror of death. He had been

a prisoner so long that he had come to the conclusion that his gaolers did not intend to kill him. Perhaps the intention was to keep him in solitary confinement for the rest of his natural life.

Sometimes he wondered how long he would live under such conditions. He had read of prisoners in the Bastile and elsewhere who had kept their health and reason for years. But he hoped he might be spared that fate. If he could not die he hoped he might become insane, so that he might not know or understand what or where he was.

Many times a day he prayed for grace and strength that he might endure as a good soldier, and that no terror or darkness or pain might cause him to fall from God. He prayed also that God's mercy might be shown to his father, and that those who had wronged him so cruelly might be forgiven.

He always felt better after he had prayed. It was as though a hand had touched him in the darkness and imparted to him strength and comfort.

He had been praying just before Davy came to him with words of treachery on his lips, and while he prayed it was as though a great light shone into his heart.

"Perhaps God has something good in store for me," he said to himself. And the next moment the voice of Davy called from the room below.

"Yes!" he cried, going to the opening in the floor and looking down.

"I have news for you," Davy said. "Come down at once."

"Good news?" he questioned.

"Well, I should call it good news if I were in your place," was the reply.

Instantly Roger began to descend the ladder, and in a few moments stood before Davy.

"Now what is it you want with me?" he asked impatiently.

"I want to propose something," was the reply. "When we brought you here we meant to kill you. You understand that, don't you?"

"I think so."

"Well, we're willing now not to do it; but on one condition."

"And what is that?" Roger asked eagerly.

"That you will keep dark for six whole days, and not let a single soul know that you are about."

"But what is the good of that?"

"All the good. It'll give Jacob and me time to clear out of the country, don't you see?"

"I see, and you will leave my uncle to take his chance?"

"Exactly. He ain't behaved square to us over this matter, so we'll have our revenge now by letting you escape. Will you agree to the conditions?"

"Yes, gladly."

"You must get down on your knees and take your Bible oath that you won't show yourself for a week or make any effort to catch us."

"I solemnly promise," Roger said, dropping upon his knees.

"You're a man of your word, I know," Davy said, after a pause. "But, by King George, if you break your promise——"

"I'll not break it," Roger interposed quickly, impatient now to breathe the sweet air of liberty.

"Then you can go. It's after midnight, and as dark as pitch outside. Jacob's at the other end of the passage; he'll see you safe into the open. I expect you can find your way through the woods to Bewleigh."

"No fear of that," said Roger, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "Let me shake hands with you and thank you for your kindness."

"Oh, I don't want no thanks," Davy answered, doing his best to keep his face, "but I'll shake hands all the same, and I hope you'll have a good time." And he went and unlocked the door and threw it open.

Roger followed him at once, and slipped past him through the open door.

"It's a longish passage, and terrible dark!" Davy called. "But you can't miss your way!"

"Good-bye, Davy, and thank you!" Roger called

back. And, stretching out his hands on either side, so that he might not run against the sides of the passage, he hurried along as fast as his numbed limbs would carry him.

He had no suspicion of danger. Davy's story was so straightforward, and told with such an air of sincerity, that he never dreamed that he was not telling the truth. Moreover, his powers of perception were considerably dulled by his confinement in the dark and dismal tower, while he was so eager to be free that he did not take ordinary precautions to assure himself that treachery was not meant. On and on he ran, while Davy watched from the tower doorway, or rather listened to his footfalls along the stone corridor, for it was too dark to see him after the first few yards.

Suddenly a wild, agonising shriek rang out in the darkness, followed by a dull plunge. Then all grew still.

Davy rushed up to the gaping well into which Roger had disappeared, and, getting hold of the edge of the stone flag, he pulled it forward, and it fell into its place with a bang.

"There!" he said to Jacob, who came running up from the other direction; "we've finished him off now, and he'll never trouble either of us again!"

"That is so," the Oriental said slowly. "He will not trouble us again, and he is beyond all trouble himself."

CHAPTER XX

“FEAR HATH TORMENT”

N EITHER Davy nor the Oriental spoke again until they were in the open air. Jacob was in no humour for conversation. Though he had done many things during his lifetime that would not bear the light of Christian teaching, and, generally speaking, was not in the least troubled by conscientious scruples, yet somehow this last act of his jarred upon his feelings and troubled him in a way he could not understand.

For many reasons he was glad that Roger had been safely despatched, and despatched in such an easy and convenient way. Yet he felt that the whole proceeding had been cowardly and cold-blooded to the last degree. Moreover, he had been greatly touched by Roger's behaviour while in captivity. His gentleness, his patience, his readiness to forgive, had made a profound impression on the Oriental's mind and heart. He had never seen the real inwardness of Christianity before; he had never realised that it was anything more than a mere “ism.” Now he felt in a vague, undefined way

that it was much more than that; that it had power to comfort people in sorrow, and make them strong and patient and heroic in the presence of danger and death. Nay, that it could do even more—that it could quell the spirit of hatred and revenge that rose naturally in the human heart, and enable a man to forgive his bitterest foes.

Jacob could not have put his thoughts into words or given any true description of his feelings, for his mind was a machine that moved slowly at the best of times; nevertheless, a train of thoughts and emotions had been set in operation that he had no power to check or control.

"You're very quiet, Jacob," Davy said, when they mounted the steps and felt the fresh night air upon their brows.

"I was thinking," the Oriental observed.

"You're quite sure you locked the door?"

"Quite sure."

"Then if I was you I'd lose the key. We shall neither of us want to go down there again."

Jacob shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

"'Tain't a cheerful place any road," Davy went on, "and nobody'll catch me there again."

"There are several things left in the tower," Jacob observed.

"Let 'em remain," the other grunted. "They can

do no harm; and what's the use bothering about 'em?"

"I don't want to go there again," Jacob said, after a pause. And he shivered slightly, for the night air was chilly.

A few minutes later they separated, Jacob entering the house by a side door, and Davy returning to his room over the coach-house. Davy no sooner laid his head upon his pillow than he fell fast asleep. He was not troubled with conscientious scruples, and no trick of memory and no picture of his imagination had power to disturb his repose.

The Oriental, however, was of a different type. He crept slowly and noiselessly to his room, and was soon in bed, but sleep was out of the question. He was fanciful and superstitious and apprehensive. He could not get that last cry of Roger's out of his mind; it rang through the chambers of his brain constantly. Whenever he was on the point of dropping off to sleep that wild despairing shriek seemed to ring out into the darkness, almost curdling the blood in his veins.

He dared scarcely open his eyes lest he should see the white ghost of Roger walking in his room. In one of their conversations Roger had asked him if he was not afraid that his spirit would come back to haunt him, and he had not been able to put the words out of his mind. Though he had expressed no fear at the

time, and declared that only the spirits of bad people came back, and that the spirits of the good rested in peace, and had no desire to return, yet he was not at all sure that even Roger might not try to avenge his cruel death by haunting him for the remainder of his life.

He was exceedingly glad when the light of the summer morning began to steal into his bedroom, but it was not until broad daylight that he was able to snatch a wink of sleep.

During the day he went about his work in a listless and unhappy fashion ; the events of the previous night were scarcely absent for a moment from his mind. He avoided Davy, for he did not want to have any conversation on the matter, while he kept as far away as possible from the ruins of the old abbey.

For several days he remained in a state of great depression, and moved like an uneasy ghost through the house. Fortunately for him, his master had gone to London, and he and the old housekeeper were left to do exactly what they liked. He never attempted any conversation with the old woman, for she was so deaf that any kind of talk with her was an infliction that he always tried to avoid. But now and then he grew uneasy under her glance, and wondered if she had any suspicion of their secret.

Davy, being left to his own devices, did not trouble Jacob with his company. So the Oriental moved up

and down the house and along its silent corridors, thinking his own thoughts, and weaving often very unpleasant fancies. Now and then he stole away to the ruins of the old abbey, and once or twice he stood at the head of the steps and looked at the great door at the foot, and wondered if he should open it again and go to the tower that had served as Roger's prison.

He did not know why he came near the place; he would be glad for an earthquake to come and swallow up for ever that part of Stonehurst. He never thought about it without a little shudder, and yet it held him with a spell that he could not resist. The heavily-bolted door fascinated him almost, and he was constantly wondering whether anything had been left behind that in days or years to come would give a clue to the crime.

So persistently did this idea haunt him that he felt at length that, at all risks, he must go and search the place from end to end. He shrank from the undertaking with a perfect dread, and put off the task hour after hour and day after day. Yet it drew him irresistibly, and he knew that sooner or later he would have to descend those gloomy steps, unlock the door, march along that dark and echoing corridor, walk over the well down which Roger had disappeared, and into the gloomy tower that had been his prison.

So one afternoon, while the sun was shining brightly

on the outer world, he took the key and stole away to the old abbey. He looked cautiously around him, then disappeared down the steps, opened the door as quickly as possible, and closed it behind him ; then, getting a light, stole silently and tremblingly along the passage.

On reaching the mouth of the well he examined the flag that lay upon it. It filled the place to a nicety ; there was scarcely any evidence that it had ever been moved. He bent his ear for some time to listen, as if expecting that Roger was still alive, and that he would hear him cry. He knew very well that if a cry came up out of the depths of the well he would be compelled to lift the flag and lower a rope to the young man's rescue. But, though he listened very intently, not a sound broke the solemn stillness. The place was as silent as a vault.

With a little shudder, he turned away at length and entered the tower. Climbing the ladder to the upper room, he gathered together the articles of attire that Roger had discarded, and made a little bundle of them. He also picked up some remnants of food that remained, which he placed in the centre of the bundle ; then quickly descending the steps, he glanced hastily round the lower room, and silently passed out through the open door and locked it behind him.

He did not remain near the well on his return ; he hurried past it as quickly as possible, opened the other

door at the end of the passage, and up the stairs again into the sunlight, and after looking about him cautiously made for the side door of the house, which he entered unobserved.

Yet several times during the afternoon he fancied that the old housekeeper looked suspiciously at him, until he was unable to get the idea out of his mind that she had been watching his movements, and that she knew more of the matter than he had imagined.

Now, it is of the very nature of a fear or suspicion to grow and strengthen ; moreover, when once a suspicion takes possession of the mind, it is easy to get confirmatory evidence from all quarters. Half-averted glances from the old woman's eyes, which at one time he would not have noticed at all, now filled him with alarm, and convinced him that she knew a good deal if she chose to reveal it.

By the time darkness had once more settled upon the earth, Jacob fully believed that his secret was shared by another, and that at any time the hounds of justice might be let loose upon him, and he be dragged to prison and to the gallows. This new fear, added to the old one, made his life a torment. Instead of going to bed at the usual time, he walked up and down his room like an uneasy ghost.

At length an idea began to shape itself in his mind which quickly grew into a settled resolution. Carefully

dressing himself in European attire, and putting a number of necessary things in a small bag, also taking all the money he possessed, which was a fairly considerable sum, he waited until midnight, and then stole quietly down the stairs and out of the house.

He resolved that he would get away from Stonehurst as far as possible, that he would reach some seaport town and there get a ship and sail away to his own country. He had never loved the cold climate of England, and he loved the people as little as he loved the climate. The captain had held him by the force of fear, and by many threats, which made him an abject slave. Now he was resolved to take his risk. If he could escape from England he would do so. He fancied that by walking only through the night-time, and spending the days in the heart of some wood or plantation, he would be able to escape observation until he had reached a part of the country where his presence would not be recognised. Then he would easily find his way to some shipping port, and sail away to the sunny land from which he came.

When Davy discovered that Jacob was missing he did not trouble his head about the matter. The old housekeeper wondered, but said nothing. Her master was away in London, and she did not know where to write; so it came about that no one attempted to track the Oriental. He stole away in the darkness, and in

the darkness he journeyed for many days, his hope being that when the seas rolled between him and England he would forget Roger, and all that happened while he had been at Stonehurst would be as a painful dream.

But it is a great law of life that what a man sows that he reaps. We may escape human justice, but we cannot escape the Divine. The laws of God work silently, and, humanly speaking, relentlessly. Jacob found it easy enough to escape from the scene of his wrong-doing ; but he did not escape from himself. He took his memories with him. Imagination still did its work. Nor was that all. Oriental though he was, he was not without that inward monitor which is planted in the breast of all men, and which we designate conscience. Not a sensitive conscience in his case, by any means, and yet sufficiently so to make him wish a hundred times that he had never consented to the death of Roger !

By the end of the week he had reached London, but he was never able to get farther. Unused to the traffic of the streets, in a careless moment he was run over, a few days after his arrival, and was taken to a hospital, where he remained several weeks.

When he was able to get about again he tried to find a ship sailing for India, but in this he was unsuccessful ; just then no ships for India were leaving the Thames.

When at length he did find a ship sailing for the port he desired, his fears prevented him from embarking. He was just about to go along the gangway from the dock-side to the vessel, when he saw a man standing on the deck whom he took to be Constable Polkinghorne of St. Mullion. So certain was he in his mind that an officer of the law was waiting to arrest him as soon as he got on board, that he turned on his heel and fled in the opposite direction, and for a long time he never ventured near the dock again.

Later on he got an idea into his mind that the captain had set men to watch all the ports from which people sailed to India, and that if he made any attempt to get out of England, he would be at once arrested. Hence his only safety seemed to be in remaining in the heart of the city, and losing himself in the great crowds of people that daily thronged its streets.

Jacob was not without ability and power to adapt himself to his surroundings, so he succeeded in getting work, though not of any regular kind, but sufficient to provide for his wants with an occasional draw upon the money he had saved.

So the days passed away, and grew into weeks and months, and still the conviction deepened that sooner or later the justice of Heaven would discover him, and

that he would have to pay the penalty of his crime. He tried constantly to shake himself free of this feeling, which lay upon his heart like a nightmare, but he was quite unequal to the task.

He believed that English laws and English rule overcame all obstacles, broke down all opposition, ferreted out all secrets, and that in the end nothing escaped their clutches.

Life became a burden to him after a while. He felt that he was only putting off the evil day, that step by step he was getting nearer to his destiny, that the coils were tightening round him every hour, that some morning he would wake to the fact that his secret was known to everybody, and that he was being called upon to answer for his crimes.

A cynic may say that he was suffering from a species of insanity ; that his native superstition had turned his brain. Be that as it may, the conviction grew and grew that he was destined not to escape, and that, sooner or later, justice would demand its full penalty.

He often wondered what had become of Davy, and whether he suffered in a similar way.

Had he known that when Davy came to the point of death he, too, was driven to confession, and only prevented from telling the whole story by the quick approach of the last enemy, it would have confirmed him still further in his conviction.

He knew, however, nothing of Davy's fate; he only felt that, sooner or later, he would have to confess the secret which was weighing heavier and heavier upon his mind.

At length the burden became so intolerable that he resolved that he would walk back to St. Mullion and confess everything. Life was not worth living while haunted incessantly by his fears.

When once his mind was made up he was quick to carry his resolve into execution. He turned his back upon the great city and commenced his westward tramp. Hour after hour, day after day, he plodded on, resolving that he would walk the whole distance back as he had walked it before.

He sometimes imagined the consternation that would be aroused in St. Mullion when he arrived and told his story, and felt a vague kind of pleasure in picturing the anger and excitement of the people, as well as their relief, at having the mystery cleared up.

What would be done to him he did not know, and he did not very much care. He only felt that he could not bear the burden of his secret any longer.

Step by step he drew nearer and nearer the end of his journey, till by-and-by he reached a hill-top overlooking the little town.

Here he sat himself down to rest a while in the sunshine. He was exhausted with his long journey,

hungry from long fasting, sleepy from long vigil. Looking across the little town he could see the old church with its square tower rising among the trees, and not far from the church the rectory, with its ivy-covered walls gleaming in the sunlight.

To the right stretched the great park of Bewleigh, and crowning a low hill was the fine old mansion where Sir George lived, and for which his master had committed so great a crime. Farther again to the right he could see in the distance the beautiful home of Mr. Bolitho.

Seawards, over a wide sweep of undulating hills, among which the Reagle gleamed in many a bay and backwater, he could catch just a glimpse of Stonehurst, a place that he loved for its beauty and hated for the crime that he had been driven to commit in its shadow.

“It does not matter,” he said to himself. “Nothing matters; nothing can undo what I have done. I have been a coward and wicked; but the God of these Christians, and the laws of this great country, will not let me escape.

“I don’t want to escape. I want to tell the truth and find peace within. And they—and they—ah! that will I leave. Now, let me look my last; for tomorrow, prison and death!”

CHAPTER XXI

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

IN the last chapter we have anticipated events somewhat. We will now return to the night when Roger was so basely tricked by his gaolers. Directly he found himself sinking down into empty space he gave himself up for lost. And, with a wild cry which he could not resist, he felt the cold water close above his head.

The pit into which he fell was by no means a deep one ; and without touching the sides he dropped sheer into the icy water, never, however, losing consciousness. In a few moments his feet touched the bottom. Indeed, no sooner had the water closed above his head than his feet were on the solid ground. The next moment his head was above the surface again.

In struggling for life he was only obeying a primal instinct of his nature. He soon discovered that the water was not deep enough to drown him unless he lay down and permitted it to cover his head. Standing erect it only reached his armpits, so he began to feel round him in the darkness, while hope sprang for a

moment in his heart. The sides were damp and slimy ; but at one point his hand shot out into space, and naturally he followed.

He was not long in discovering that he was at the end of a tunnel ; but how long it was and where it led he had no means of ascertaining. To follow it was simply to obey an impulse. He had no time to reason. To get out of the cold, slimy water was his only desire for the moment. Reaching out his hands and touching the sides, he walked on and on, finding that the water got shallower every step he took. He discovered, in fact, that he was ascending a slight incline, and after a while he found that the floor of the tunnel was quite dry.

He did not pause even to reflect. Still obeying a natural impulse that would not allow him to stand still, he moved forward into the darkness as fast as he could go. Where the tunnel was leading him he had no idea ; how long he might wander in the darkness he did not know ; and whether liberty lay in that direction was a question that he scarcely dared discuss. Just at present he was too bewildered to think, he could only act ; and as his action was limited by the sides of the tunnel in which he moved, there was nothing for him to do but to advance into the darkness as long as there was an opening in front of him.

At length, however, he struck his foot against some-

thing and fell forward upon his face, and for a moment or two lay quite still, stunned and bewildered. When his mind was clear again, he rose slowly to his feet, and reaching out his hands, until his fingers touched the sides of the tunnel, he said to himself—

“Now let me think. I must keep some mental idea of the way I am taking. This tunnel is connected in some way with the old abbey—dug out, perhaps, by the monks of a former generation. I wonder where it leads, or if it leads anywhere? If I had only brought matches and candles with me there might still be hope; but alas, alas! I am doomed to darkness.”

Then a gleam of hope, like a ray of light, stole into his mind and heart.

“I am not dead yet,” he said to himself with a smile, “though I confess my circumstances are desperate. But since my life is spared to me, may I not hope that there is yet deliverance?—that this tunnel leads outwards to the sea? It must have been dug originally for some purpose, and surely it must lead somewhere!” And with this thought in his mind he went forward again, but more slowly than before.

“I must be cautious,” he said, “or I may fall into some unsuspected pit, or strike my head in the darkness against some projecting rock. Oh, if God delivers me from this, I shall never doubt His providence again, or think that anything is impossible!”

So, buoyed up by the thought of God's providence, and cheered by that imperishable hope that burns like a lamp in the darkest night, and will not let us despair, however desperate our condition, he moved steadily and cautiously forward.

So far he had pursued a fairly even road ; but suddenly the tunnel opened out into what appeared to be a cave of considerable dimensions. For a moment he stood still and shouted into the darkness, and his voice died away in a number of reverberations.

"I must be cautious here," he said to himself, "and pick my way carefully."

And, getting down upon his hands and knees, he crawled slowly forward. Suddenly his right hand went over into space, and he drew back with a shudder.

"I am on the brink of another pit," he said to himself. "I must feel my way now with greater caution."

After a while hope nearly died out of his heart, for the pit seemed to block his path entirely, and, growing weary in the endeavour to find some solid ground in front of him, he rose to his knees and clasped his hands in prayer, beseeching God either to grant him deliverance or to take him speedily out of his troubles.

He felt that if he were tried much more his brain would reel, and his reason utterly fail him. For a while he did not attempt to change his position ; he was afraid

to move either forward or backward. To go back was simply to return to death ; to go forward seemed to lead to the same end, and so the instinct of self-preservation prompted him to remain still.

Unfortunately, however, thinking could bring him no relief. If there was any way of escape he must find it by his own efforts. So, after he had rested for the best part of an hour, he turned a little to the right and discovered a narrow ledge leading past the mouth of the pit. Had he a light he would not have dared to venture across, but in the darkness he did not fully realise his danger. Moreover, his case was so desperate that he was compelled to run some risk, and it seemed easier to die struggling than to remain still and perish by slow torture and starvation.

He still crept forward on his hands and knees, feeling carefully every step he took. To keep a mental idea of the way he was taking was now quite impossible. Such openings as were before him twisted and turned in all kinds of ways.

Sometimes he found himself climbing up an incline, at others descending a path, the steepness of which alarmed him very considerably.

Now the tunnel took a sudden turn to the right, and now again to the left, for he had left the cave behind him, and discovered that the tunnel in which he moved was narrower and lower than at the first.

Finding himself steadily able to advance, hope rose bright in his heart once more. He knew that he had got away a considerable distance from Stonehurst; also he had an idea that he had been travelling in the direction of the sea, and, measuring in his imagination the distance between the rocky cliffs of St. Mullion Porth and Stonehurst, he fancied that he had at least covered half the distance. This thought not only gave him courage, but inspired him with patience.

"I must not expect to see the daylight yet," he said to himself. "I must travel on as far again before I can dare cherish any hope in that direction. My great fear now is that in some place the tunnel may have fallen in, and my path be blocked by rocks and earth."

He put aside the gloomy fears, however, to the best of his ability. His life hitherto had been spared in such a wonderful way that he felt as if God had still a work for him to do, and was preparing him for higher service in the days and years to come.

"Surely if God did not intend me to live," he said to himself, "He would not let me pass through all these trials. He would not let me hope so much only to crush me in outer darkness."

And yet scarcely had these hopeful thoughts passed through his mind than he found himself face to face with a wall of solid rock. The tunnel appeared to have given out suddenly and ended in a cul-de-sac. Right

and left, top and bottom, the ground seemed to be closing about him. In his bewildered state he felt as though the walls were coming closer and closer together, and that he would be crushed as in a vice.

So strong did this feeling become at length that he lay flat upon the floor and placed his hands over his eyes, and tried to wait calmly and patiently until all the life should be crushed out of him. How long he lay there he never knew, for he had no means of measuring the march of time, but by-and-by the clouds seemed to lift for a moment, and he struggled to his feet again and made another attempt to find a way of escape.

He had been guiding himself with his right hand as he had come along ; on that side, therefore, he was quite certain there was no opening. But it was just possible that on the left-hand side he might find a hole somewhere, into which he might creep. So, drawing himself to that side of the tunnel, he walked slowly and carefully along, feeling in the darkness for any opening that might occur.

At length, to his joy, his hand went out into space, and he discovered that another tunnel was running at nearly right angles with the one along which he had come.

So overjoyed was he at this discovery, and so wide and lofty appeared to be the tunnel, that, stretching out his hands so that he might not run against the rocks on

either side, he bounded forward with all the speed that he could command.

Suddenly his foot sank to a lower level, and before he could recover himself he went head foremost down a steep jumble of rocks, and a moment later he lay at the bottom, bleeding and unconscious.

For many hours he remained like one dead, while a slow trickle of blood oozed from a deep cut in his right temple. At last he had found peace.

And while he lay there in the darkness a new day dawned and ran its course, and evening came on again, and night darkened on the outer world once more.

Then consciousness came back to him again, but dimly and uncertainly. He sat up and stared about him, and wondered where he was and why the scent of seaweed was in his nostrils—wondered, too, at the distant sound like the muttering of far-off thunder. Then, in a lucid moment, he grasped the truth: that he was in a cave near the sea. He could smell the salt air, he could feel the cool wind blowing upon his brow.

At length he struggled to his feet, and began to move forward again slowly and uncertainly. But every few yards he paused abruptly, and placed his hands to his forehead and knitted his brows as if to recall something. As a matter of fact, he was able only to reason at intervals, and then only in a vague, disjointed way. But during those intervals he pressed forward with all the

strength and energy that he could command ; and after what seemed to him to be days and nights of wandering, but which in reality was little more than an hour, he found himself standing in the mouth of a cave and looking outward on the sea.

The tide was nearly at its height, but at the foot of the cliff there was still a narrow strip of sand. As soon as he got into the open air, he began to run along the beach as though his enemies were in hot pursuit. He fancied himself followed by a crowd of people who were anxious to catch him. He got away as far from the cliffs and as near the sea as possible, for he had an idea that on the tops of the cliffs were people who were trying to descend and capture him.

He had no idea where he was, and in fact he was not quite certain who he was. He was simply haunted by a vague fear that his enemies were after him, and the instinct of life prompted him to run with all his speed, and keep as far away from the cliffs as possible.

By-and-by the water stopped him, and he had to turn towards the land. A creek ran up between the cliffs, and seemed gradually to hem him in on every side.

A steep zigzag of steps, cut in the face of the cliff, was near to him, but he did not notice it ; and, even had he done so, he would not have attempted the ascent. What he did notice, however, was that a boat lay in the

creek, and was anchored by means of a grapnel that was close to him.

Only dimly realising what he was doing, and, having no definite end in view, he began to pull at the rope and draw the boat towards him. In a few minutes he was able to wade into the water and get into the boat; then, unfastening the rope at her prow, he flung it from him, and seizing the oars began to pull with all his might. A few minutes, and the oars slipped from his hands and floated away on the waves.

When he came to consciousness again he found that he was not very far from the land, and still haunted by the old fear, and having sufficient strength and consciousness to hoist the little sail, he did so quickly, and the wind filling it sped him seaward. Then consciousness left him once more and he lay prone in the bottom of the boat, while the wind sped him on and on over the dark, rollicking waves.

Hour after hour under the great dome of stars he lay in the bottom of the boat unconscious of the fact that the wind was bearing him farther and farther from land. By-and-by, when the stars began to melt into the light of dawn, he opened his eyes again and a glimmer of consciousness returned to him, but it was only for a moment.

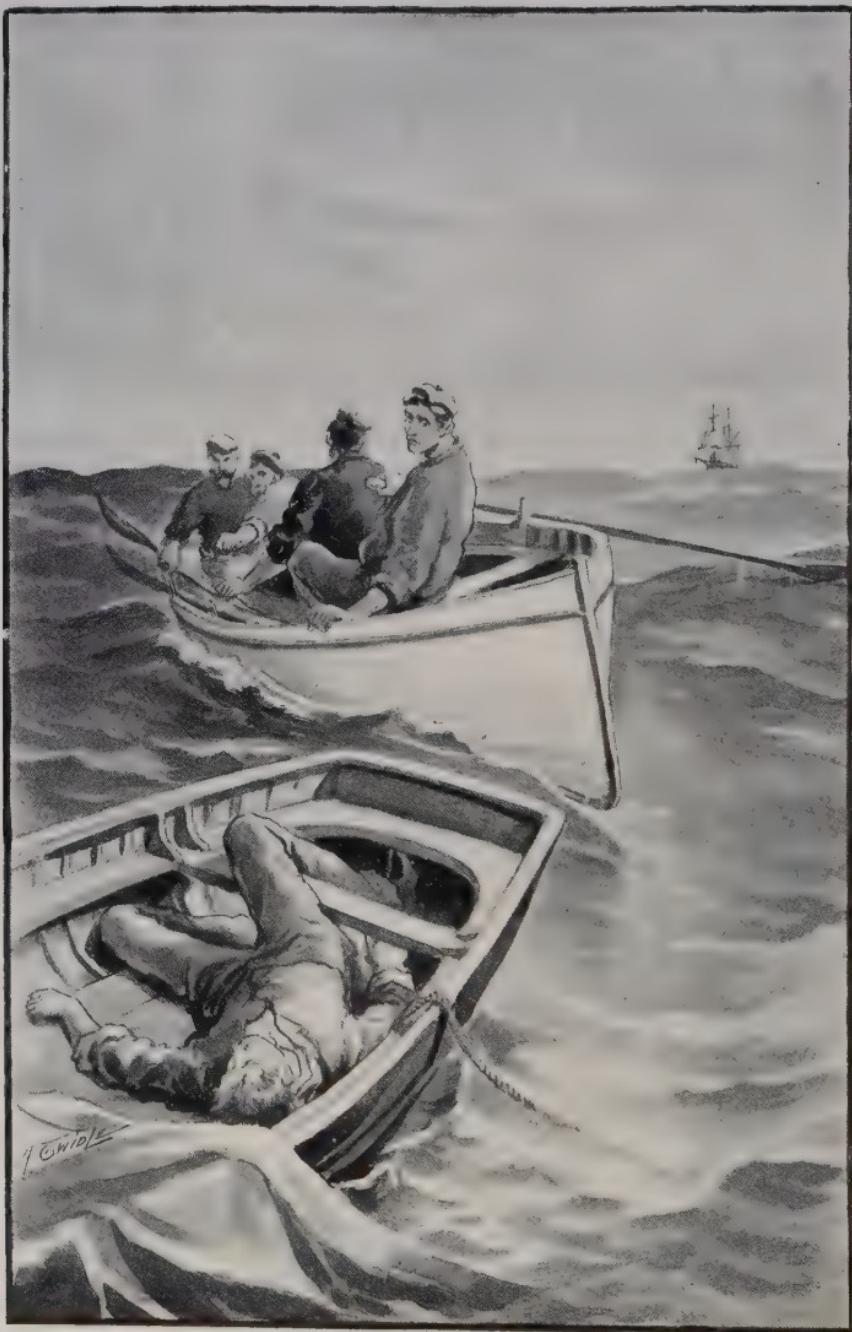
His pulse was throbbing at fever heat, his blood seemed to be scorching all his veins, while his head felt

like a raging furnace. He made a desperate struggle at length to get over the side of the boat that he might quench in the sea the fire that was raging in him. Fortunately, however, for him, he had no strength to move ; he could only lie still and suffer. Mercifully for him, too, the period of consciousness passed quickly again, and he lay once more quite passive, looking up at the calm, unpitying sky that stretched above him.

Morning dawned at length ; but he did not heed it. The sun rose in the eastern sky, and climbed up and up into the heavens and poured down his hot rays upon Roger's unprotected face, blistering his cheeks and cracking his lips ; and there was scarcely a cloud to interpose in pity, and not a raindrop to cool his parched and burning tongue.

He had found freedom, but it was freedom that was worse than bondage. Life had been spared to him, but that life was worse than death. Out on the wide and lone sea he floated hour after hour in his little boat, like a chip on the rollicking waves ; and during the day no ship hove in sight, and no friendly hands were reached out to help. Had the power to think been granted him he would have concluded that God had forsaken him, or else had set him up as the plaything of a cruel and relentless fate.

Fortunately for him, he could not think, his brain was consumed by fever, his strength had been exhausted



FOUR SAILORS PULLED TOWARD THE LITTLE CRAFT.

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by effort and loss of blood, his mind was completely unhinged by all that he had passed through. No one saw him out there on the great sea, no one guessed that he floated in his little bark a helpless and friendless waif, forsaken to all appearance by man and God.

The owner of the little boat wondered how his small skiff could have broken from her moorings, and wondered still more when a little way down the coast the oars floated in, and were stranded on the beach, and spent a considerable amount of time in discussing the matter with his neighbours and trying to frame some reasonable explanation of the phenomenon.

It was on the morning of the second day that the look-out on the brig *Matilda*, bound for Calcutta with a cargo of salt, sighted the derelict boat floating helplessly on the water. The captain was at once informed, and gave orders for the ship to be put about and bear down on the object, whatever it might be.

An hour later a boat was launched from the *Matilda*, and four sailors pulled toward the little craft in which Roger lay. At first they thought he was dead, and indeed he was so near the borderland that very few signs of life remained. Within the space of half an hour he lay on the floor of the deck-house of the *Matilda*, the doctor of the ship carefully bending over him and several of the sailors standing round the door and looking on with wonder in their eyes.

He presented a curious figure as he lay there helpless on the floor. He had no hat, his hair was matted and tangled with blood and sea-water; his clothes had evidently been made for some one else, and no two articles were of the same piece; his shoes belonged to different pairs, and were both misfits; and yet there was a refinement about his face that impressed all the onlookers, while his hands were small and soft, like a woman's.

Who could he be? Whence came the gash in the temple? How was it that he was dressed in odds-and-ends of attire, as it were? How came he to be in a boat alone, with oars missing and sail set? There was evidently a mystery somewhere, but no one on the *Matilda* was able to solve it.

Dr. Stone, however, did not trouble himself about these questions; his business was to find out, if possible, the extent of his injuries, and to do his best to restore him to consciousness and health.

To a young surgeon just beginning the work of his profession such a case naturally presented many points of interest. The captain, mate, and crew of the *Matilda* were all strong and healthy men; consequently, Dr. Stone had nothing to do, and he expected that the long voyage to Calcutta would lie heavy upon his hands unless an accident rendered some of the crew hors de combat. The presence of Roger on board offered him a

welcome relief, and he set to work at once to diagnose the case and to prescribe remedies.

He had Roger conveyed to his own cabin and placed in the extra bunk that it contained. Having only this one patient, he attended to him with every care, and studied diligently every symptom. After three days, however, he gave up hope.

"The young dog is too far gone," he said to Captain Dobus, as they sat over the dinner-table. "I was in hopes I might pull him through, but evidently I have appeared too late upon the scene."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," the captain replied, "for I hate to have people dying on my ship."

"I would not mind so much," the doctor answered, "if he would recover consciousness for a few minutes, for I confess I am curious to know who he is and where he comes from."

"A rogue or sharper very likely trying to escape from justice," said the captain.

"Nay, I don't think so," was the reply. "I think there is some tragedy beneath the business; but I must go back to him again, though I fear that by this time he has passed beyond my skill." And, rising quickly from the table, he hurried away to Roger's side.

CHAPTER XXII

THROUGH CLOUD AND STORM

WHEN Dr. Stone entered the cabin where Roger lay he did not find him dead, as he feared, though a great change had taken place in his symptoms. But whether the change boded good or ill he was yet unable to determine. A few hours later, however, the question was answered to his entire satisfaction.

Roger opened his eyes slowly and looked round him, and the doctor saw with a thrill of genuine pleasure that his eyes shone with the light of intelligence.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a voice that was scarcely a whisper, so feeble was it.

"You are on board the *Matilda*, commanded by Captain Dobus, and bound for Calcutta."

"On board a ship?" he questioned, knitting his brows. "How did I get on board?"

"You were rescued from a boat nearly three days ago now. You remember, of course, getting into the boat?"

But Roger shook his head. "I remember nothing about it," he whispered.

"Well, don't try to puzzle your brain now. It will come back to you all right in time. You are recovering from a dangerous illness."

"Have I been ill long?"

"I don't know how long. Now, don't worry yourself. If you are to recover, you must keep yourself as quiet as possible and obey orders."

"But who are you?" Roger asked, with a look of wonder in his eyes.

"I am the ship's doctor. My name is Stone—Dr. Stone. You will have no difficulty in remembering it."

"Oh, if you are a doctor I will do what you tell me, of course."

"That's right. When a patient does what he is told, the battle's half over already."

"I'll be a good patient," Roger said in a whisper.

"Then take this medicine without pulling a face, and then try and get a little sleep."

Roger needed no second bidding. Indeed, he could not have kept awake had he tried. Exhausted nature needed the recuperative energy of sleep, and for six hours at the stretch he scarcely stirred. The doctor noted with pleasure that he breathed slowly and regularly. The fever had all but left him, and he had little doubt that, when he woke again, memory would

be able to gather up all the past, and that his mind would be quite clear.

The doctor was not with him when he woke again, and for several moments he was unable to comprehend his new surroundings. The narrow bunk, the little cabin, the rise and fall of the vessel as she ploughed her way over the waves, the sound of footsteps on the floor above his head, the intermittent hum of voices, faint and far away, all tended to bewilder him.

Then, just as the mists of morning roll up the hill-sides and point after point comes out and stands revealed in the golden sunlight, so the mists rolled away from his mind, and memory and everything became clear to him up to the moment when he fell down the rocky side of the cave ; but beyond that he could remember nothing.

The rest was like a dream—and a very shadowy dream at that. He tried his best to recall it. Now and then bits of it would loom suddenly out of the fog, and as suddenly vanish again ; hence, to make anything like a connected whole of it he found to be impossible.

He did not, however, worry himself much about it. The predominant feeling of his mind and heart was one of thankfulness. He was alive and on the road to recovery. He was scarcely conscious of pain at all ; he was tired—nothing more than that. He just

wanted to be still. He had no strength yet to move himself; for that reason, perhaps, he had no desire to move.

It was just delightful to be still and feel the vessel heaving and rolling on the bosom of the great deep, and watch the sunshine filtering through the skylight and lighting up the corners of the quaint little cabin, and listen to the low swish and rush of the waves outside, and hearken to the far-away song of the sailors—“Heigh-ho! heave-ho! so-ho!”

It was all so new and strange and soothing that he fell asleep again before the doctor returned, and dreamed that he was back at Bewleigh, and that Kitty Bolitho was telling him that she had never loved him, and never could love him.

When he awoke again he did not open his eyes. He lay thinking, trying to riddle out the strange Providence that had led him hitherto.

It seemed months ago since the night he was waylaid in Beaver Wood and conveyed to the tower-room at Stonehurst. He wondered how long ago it was in reality. He had lost all count of the days since Davy and Jacob stole from him his clothes and his watch.

But if time were to be measured by what a man thinks and feels and endures, he had lived a lifetime since then.

He was much too weak to worry. He wondered in

a listless way what was happening and had happened back in St. Mullion. Wondered if his father was still alive, or if the sudden shock had killed him. Wondered what Kitty thought of his absence, and if any one had any suspicion of the truth. But to think in any consecutive way was too great an effort. It was sufficient for the present to see the light and feel the sunshine once more ; to know that he was among friends, though they might be strangers ; to be assured that with care he would recover his health, and that in time he would find his way back again to St. Mullion, where he would put to shame and confusion those who had conspired to take away his life.

When Dr. Stone came again into the cabin Roger opened his eyes and greeted him with a smile.

" Ah ! you are a good deal better," the doctor said cheerily.

" Oh yes ; I am all right—except that I feel very tired."

" Don't want to move—eh ? "

" No ; I just want to lie still, and listen to the swish of the water and the far-away ' Heave ho ! ' of the sailors."

" Something new in your experience, I expect ? "

" Quite new. My father never cared to keep a yacht, so practically I have never been to sea before."

"And can you remember yet how you got into that boat in which we found you?"

"No; that part of my life is a blank. I keep trying to catch it, but it eludes me all the same."

"I presume you put out to sea of your own accord?" the doctor said.

"No doubt; but I could not have been in my right mind. You see I had had a bad fall. I remember plunging head-foremost down over the rocks, and after that everything seems a blank."

"Fell over a cliff, did you?"

"Not exactly. No—but I cannot tell you all just now. Perhaps one day I may."

"As you will. But in any case try not to excite yourself. Your recovery will depend very largely upon that."

"I don't think I shall worry," Roger said, with a smile. "I have too much to be thankful for."

Roger's recovery was slower even than the doctor anticipated. The shock to his nervous system had been so great that Nature demanded time to repair the mischief.

As Roger gathered strength he began to wonder how much of his story he should tell his new-found friend the doctor, or if he should tell him anything. It was on the whole so strange and incredible that he questioned if it would be believed, and it would be most

unpleasant to be looked at with suspicion as a mere romancer.

Yet, on the other hand, if he remained silent, would not his silence be misunderstood? Besides, it would seem ungrateful to those who had been so kind to him. Nevertheless, day after day passed away and he could not bring himself to tell who he was. Captain Carew was his own uncle, his father's only brother, and it seemed a terrible humiliation and disgrace to confess that one of his own kin was no better than a murderer.

As he got stronger Captain Dobus came into his cabin and talked with him in a very friendly fashion. But it was quite clear at the same time that he did not like the mystery that appeared to surround his guest. He asked no direct questions, but he asked any number of indirect ones, which made Roger's position an increasingly uncomfortable one.

At length the day arrived when Roger was to be dressed for the first time, and was to be carried on deck that he might enjoy the advantages of a sun-bath. The doctor brought in the odd assortment of clothes which constituted his wardrobe, and laid them on the foot of the bunk. All his underclothing had been washed and ironed, while the outer garments had been well brushed and made to look as respectable as possible.

"You seem to have left your home in a hurry," the doctor said, "by the appearance of your clothes."

Roger flushed and felt confused.

"These are not my clothes," he stammered at length. "Mine were stolen, and I had to be content with such odd articles as I could get."

"Oh, indeed!" the doctor said dryly.

Roger caught the tone of suspicion in his voice in a moment, and grew hot all over.

"I fear you doubt my respectability," Roger said, after a pause, "and I must confess these garments are not exactly—well, reassuring."

"They certainly are an odd assortment," the doctor said, with a laugh.

"And misfits at that," Roger interposed.

"The collar has the name 'Captain Carew' on it, I see," the doctor said, picking up that article and examining it.

"That is my uncle's name," Roger said, blushing. "You see, when my own clothes were taken away I was glad to get almost anything."

"Yes, so I understand."

Roger winced and coloured. There was something in the tone of the doctor's voice that stabbed him like a knife.

"I would have told you and Captain Dobus everything long ago," Roger stammered, after an embarrassing

pause, "only my story is so strange that I fear you would accuse me of romancing, or of something worse; and then, besides that, it reflects on my nearest relative —save and except my own father—and, naturally, I hesitated on his account. But I see now that it is not right that I should hide the matter any longer."

"Please do not say anything that you would rather keep to yourself," the doctor said quickly.

"No, I would rather make a clean breast of it now that I am about it. I can trust you and the captain not to let the matter go further until the proper time."

"I know the captain is curious," Dr. Stone said. "He has talked the matter over with me many times."

"Then will you ask him to come here, and I will tell him the whole story."

In a few minutes the captain's burly form in addition to the other two nearly filled the little cabin.

"I must apologise for not telling you sooner," Roger began. "But you will see my reasons later." And, plunging at once into the narrative, he did not pause for an instant until he had told the whole story.

Captain Dobus listened with eyes growing wider every moment, and when Roger had finished he sprang to his feet, exclaiming—

"Bless my soul, if this isn't the most extraordinary story I ever heard!" And he rushed out of the cabin as though some one had shot at him.

In a few minutes he was back again, with a file of newspapers in his hand.

"There's more in this matter than has been ferreted out yet!" he said breathlessly. And he sat down with a jerk, and began to run his eye down the columns of a newspaper.

"Ah, here it is!" he said, at length. "This paper was published on the day we sailed. Now, what do you make of this?" And he began to read—

"Yesterday morning the mystery connected with the disappearance of Roger Carew, only son of Sir George Carew, and heir to the Bewleigh estates, was cleared up by the finding of his body in one of the backwaters of the River Reagle. Since his disappearance, more than a week ago, a careful watch has been kept along the banks of the river, and yesterday morning John Davy, Captain Carew's groom, came upon the body, floating face downwards, in about four feet of water, and almost hidden among the rushes and water-weed. Though somewhat decomposed, the body was easily recognisable. No mark of violence was found upon it, while watch, purse, and papers were found in the pockets intact, hence all suspicion of foul play has been dissipated. An inquest was held on the remains last evening, and after a few minutes' deliberation the jury returned a verdict of 'Found drowned.' The interment will take place to-morrow afternoon in the family vault of St.

Mullion. Sir George Carew bears his great loss with wonderful fortitude and resignation."

It was now Roger's turn to open his eyes, and he did so.

For several seconds after the captain had done reading there was absolute silence in the cabin.

Then the doctor spoke.

"I confess I don't understand this," he said, looking hard at Roger.

"But I do," was the reply of the latter. "They dressed some dead body in my clothes and flung it into the river. I understand now why they insisted on having every particle of my clothes, and would not let me take a single thing out of the pockets."

"But it would be very difficult to palm off another body as yours," said the doctor.

"Not if it was moderately like me, and dressed in my clothes. Besides, the report says that it was considerably decomposed."

"You are right, young man," said the doctor, after a pause. "I can see it all now. It would be much easier to put a dead body in the river, provided they could get hold of it, than to drown a living one. And when the body was accepted as yours, why, they could despatch you in some other way. Fortunate for you that those old monks dug a tunnel from the Abbey to the old smugglers' caves."

"And equally fortunate that I was able to steer my way through. To me, captain, it seems a direct interposition of Providence, and I think nothing will convince me to the contrary."

"Well, well, my lad, keep all the faith you can. I am sorry that mine, like a silver sixpence, grows thin with age. Perhaps that is my fault. But I envy those who have no doubts. And now, what is to be done about the future? We cannot turn the *Matilda* home again."

"I shall lose nothing by waiting," Roger said cheerfully.

"I am not so sure of that," the others chimed in. "That uncle of yours may make ducks and drakes of the estates before you get back again."

"I am not going to worry about that," Roger said, with a smile. "Besides, if father is still alive it will be all right."

"If we hail a homeward-bound ship we may send word to your father that you are still alive."

"Or put me on board," said Roger.

"Ay, that would be better still."

"I would like to walk in and take them by surprise. I think the look on my uncle's face will be worth seeing."

After that day Roger was treated with great deference and attention. The sailors were given to understand

that he was a person of some importance, and they treated him accordingly.

The captain and doctor became his fast friends, and but for his anxiety and impatience to relieve his father's mind, there would have been nothing to throw the least shadow on his enjoyment.

The *Matilda* steadily rolled her way across the Bay of Biscay, across the South Atlantic Ocean, across the South Pacific, and into the Indian Ocean, but still no homeward-bound vessel came within hail. The days grew into weeks and the weeks into months, and still, with alternate storm and calm, they rolled on and on.

Roger decided now that he would attempt to send no letter. He would be the bearer of his own message. He would give his uncle no chance of escape. He would stand before him face to face.

But how often it happens that while man proposes God disposes. The crew of the *Matilda* were beginning to look forward to the end of their voyage with many anticipations, when a typhoon caught her suddenly in its embrace, and she became a total wreck.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RECTOR GETS A SURPRISE

ROGER'S faith and courage received a rude shock when he found himself with the doctor and half a dozen of the crew of the *Matilda* stranded on a little island that scarcely rose above the level of the sea, and quite out of the track of passing vessels. He had been comforting himself with the reflection that there was over him a special and particular Providence—that Divine justice was interposing on his behalf to restore him to his rights, and to punish the evil-doers.

In face of this new calamity, however, that had overtaken him, his faith flickered and wavered and threatened to go out altogether. He seemed more like the plaything of a grim and saturnine fate than the charge of a merciful Providence. But as time went on his faith came back to him again, and he was able to preach hope and patience and courage to his companions, and with a cheerful heart. And most of them needed such preaching, for they got very low and depressed sometimes.

Dr. Stone was to have been married at the close of

the voyage, and had often spoken to Roger—as they became better acquainted—of the grace and sweetness of his lady-love. But now as the days and weeks slipped by and grew into months, and no friendly vessel ever hove into sight, and the prospect of deliverance seemed to grow more and more remote, his patience and courage began to give out completely.

"Even if we are rescued in the years to come," he said one day to Roger—"why, no one knows what will have happened."

"You think she may have pined herself to death?" Roger questioned.

"Oh, no, I don't think people do that nowadays. But you know there was another fellow who always wanted her, and if she believes that I am drowned—why, who knows?"

"But if she is worthy of you she will wait a reasonable time, at any rate," Roger said encouragingly.

"A reasonable time, yes. But this isn't a reasonable time. We've been on this wretched island six months already, and we may have to stay here six years for all we know."

"It's better than being locked up in a dungeon, at any rate," Roger said, with a smile. "I was inclined to be a bit down myself at the beginning, but I get more hopeful as the days go on. Every day brings us nearer the time of our deliverance."

"I'm not so sure of that. I felt all right the first day or two; but we were kept busy then getting ashore what stores we could from the wreck, and making this wretched sandbank habitable. But now that we have little to do and plenty of time to think, I lose heart completely."

"It's monotonous, certainly," Roger said. "And one gets sick of fish and eggs, and such fruit as our poor little farm yields us. Still, we might be a good deal worse off, and God has not forgotten us."

"I am not so sure of that," the doctor said lugubriously. "But you have never been in love, or you would talk differently."

Roger smiled pathetically, but did not answer. But in a moment he was back in imagination in the dear old days when Kitty and he were the best of all friends and comrades.

It was not often, however, that he allowed Kitty to occupy a very large place in his thoughts. He had fearlessly faced the situation, and frankly given up hope of winning her. He was not one of those who believe that women do not know their own minds two days in succession, and if they say no to-day they will be more likely to say yes to-morrow.

Kitty, he believed, was not of the fickle sort, she knew her own mind and heart intimately, and when she told him that she could never look upon him in

any other light than that of a friend, he believed that the last word on the subject had been spoken. As to trying to worry a girl into giving her consent, he regarded that as foolish in the extreme. Unless a woman said "yes" freely and without reservation, he believed that it was better that their hands should never be clasped in wedlock.

Hence in all those weeks and months Roger had never indulged in any hope of returning to Bewleigh and winning Kitty Bolitho. That page in his history was done with, the volume closed and sealed. He hoped some day to return, and he believed that in the providence of God he would. So far his life had been preserved in a most wonderful manner, and he could not doubt, except at odd moments when physical depression weighed upon his spirits, that some time in the future deliverance would be granted to them, and he would return again to claim his rights and see that justice was done.

So eighteen months passed away, and then they were taken off the island by a pearl-smack that had been driven far out of her course, and in time were landed on the Island of Borneo. Hence, after waiting some weeks, they were conveyed to Japan. From Japan they managed to get passage to Melbourne, and then were shipped to England. Roger, however, had stipulated with the doctor that no news should be sent on

of their safety. He was anxious to return unexpectedly. So it happened that more than two years after his sudden and unaccountable disappearance he returned again to his native place.

In appearance he was very greatly changed, and in the twilight might have passed among his closest friends and acquaintances without being recognised. His face was tanned with long exposure to a tropical sun, and a well-grown beard adorned his face and chin. He was stouter, with a better development of chest and muscles than when he went away. Indeed, he was a much handsomer man. His outdoor life had added considerably to his physical strength and grace.

He landed at Plymouth, and made his way by easy stages to St. Mullion, gathering up many scraps of information as he went along. He learned of his father's death long before he reached the village, and though he was not greatly surprised, the news came to him with a sense of bitter loss. In all his hopes and dreams of home he had thought of his father. He had often pictured their meeting in imagination—had heard his father's words of welcome.

He had fancied the glad light that would come into his eyes when he recognised the familiar face and form, and how they would talk together far on into the night of all that had happened since they had been so cruelly

separated. Now this hope was suddenly dashed to the ground, and what he had anticipated with such eagerness through all his long exile and captivity was swept from him, and the joy of home-coming was turned into a bitter sorrow.

Seeking a lonely place by the wayside, he sat down and wept, and for a little while he almost hesitated whether or not to turn back and leave his uncle in undisturbed possession of Bewleigh. The place had no charm for him now; the presence that had made it a delight had vanished, and he would feel there like a stranger in a strange land.

This feeling, however, quickly passed away. It was but a momentary depression, and he shook himself quickly free from it, and, rising to his feet, marched forward again.

It was evening when he came in sight of St. Mullion, nestled snugly and securely among the hills, and almost dark when he entered its familiar and dimly-lighted streets. His heart beat fast as the familiar features of the place one after another unfolded themselves dimly before him. It seemed a generation ago since he went away, so much had been crowded into it—so much of sorrow and suffering and loss—and yet the little town was quite unchanged. Time had left no mark upon it; there were the same people moving to and fro in the dimly-lighted streets, bent on the

same errands, and looking not two minutes older than they did two years ago.

And yet somehow he felt himself strangely out of place. St. Mullion had not changed, he knew, but he had changed. Time and trouble had wrought their work in him. He was no longer an inexperienced youth. He was a fully-developed man, who had borne during the last two years his full share of sorrow and toil and suffering. He knew more of the world, more of life, more of men. His experience had not only increased his knowledge but deepened his sympathies. He was more akin to the great race of toilers than ever before in his life.

He was afraid to speak to any one lest his voice should betray his identity. He knew that in appearance he was nothing like the young squire, with whose face and figure people were familiar. Dressed in a suit of clothes that had been furnished by the Distressed Mariners' Society, he scarcely looked like a sprig of the aristocracy. Nevertheless, though he knew that he had greatly changed in appearance, his voice was just the same. The hands might be the hands of Esau, but the voice was Jacob's.

Standing at their respective shop-doors were Peter Mudge and Richard Cobbledick, discussing the weather and the prospect of trade. He recognised their voices in a moment, while their forms were sufficiently

familiar even in the dim light. He was strongly tempted to join himself to them and ask a few questions about St. Mullion. They were both of them characters in their way, and nothing pleased them better than to retail to strangers all the gossip of the place. But fear that they might recognise him kept him silent, and he passed on. A little farther on, where the street began to slant upwards, he overtook two young ladies walking slowly and deep in conversation. In a moment he recognised one of the voices, and his heart began to beat more quickly than before. It was the voice of Kitty Bolitho. He recognised, too, her lishesome and graceful figure and her shapely, well-poised head.

Who her companion was he did not recognise then. He walked slowly past them, and tried to catch the drift of their conversation ; but in this he was unsuccessful. Every now and then their voices rang out in ripples of merry laughter. Very evidently they were both of them in a merry mood.

For a moment he wondered if she was Kitty Bolitho still, or if she had changed her name. He fancied that she was still unmarried, or she would not be walking with a young lady of her own age. That, however, was a matter, he persuaded himself, that was no concern of his. Whether she were married or single could make no difference. She had no doubt forgotten him, or if she thought of him at all it was only as a friend of her girlhood.

He hurried on at length and entered the rectory grounds. He was determined to make himself known first to Mr. Penderry, and to ask his advice as to how he should proceed in his dealings with his uncle. Moreover, he had a fear that if he faced the captain alone he might be tempted to say and do what afterwards might yield a harvest of regret.

Mr. Penderry was a good man, with a strong fund of common sense, and he had little doubt that together they would be able to devise some method of meeting Captain Carew, and giving him to understand that the day of his rule and triumph was at an end.

He felt very strange when he pulled at the rectory bell, and wondered what kind of a reception he would get—whether the rector would recognise him at once or be doubtful of his identity.

A strange servant opened the door, and when she had looked him up and down she showed him, with some little hesitation, into the rector's study. He had often been in it in the old days—indeed, at one period the rector had been his coach—so that every feature of the room was familiar to him, and nothing had been changed since he went away.

There were the same rows of books, the same series of theological treatises, the same encyclopedias, the same volumes of sermons, the same long line of green-backed poets, the same corner devoted to what the

rector called light literature. On the table lay a few volumes of new books, but in other particulars the library was unchanged. The same carpet was on the floor, the same curtains draped the windows, the same cushion even was in the rector's chair; and, as he glanced round the familiar surroundings, it seemed only as yesterday that he had stood there talking to the good man, and discussing plans for the physical and moral and intellectual improvement of the parish.

Suddenly the door opened, and the rector entered, looking scarcely older than when he last saw him. Mr. Penderry regarded him for a moment suspiciously. In his rough sea-going garb he scarcely looked a gentleman. Roger smiled as he saw the look in the rector's eyes.

"I see you don't recognise me, Mr. Penderry," he said. And in a moment the rector started and stepped back.

"No," he said, slowly drawing his hand across his brow in a bewildered way, "I cannot say I do recognise you quite, and yet your voice and your face are familiar to me."

"You have seen me often enough," Roger said.
"You should not have forgotten me so soon."

Then the rector came forward, with a strange light in his eyes, and his hands outstretched.

"Can it be possible," he said, "that you are—yes, I cannot be mistaken—you are Roger Carew?"

"Yes," Roger answered, with a smile. "I am glad you have not quite forgotten me."

"Forgotten you—no, no; but you have altered. But let me think. Sit down. Oh, I am glad to welcome you back to life again."

"And I am pleased to find myself in the old place once more," Roger answered, with a far-away look in his eyes, "though my home-coming is not what I hoped it might have been. Now that my father is dead everything is changed."

"Ah, my boy, I do not think he was sorry to go, for he believed that he would meet you in heaven."

"And my uncle, where is he?"

"He is at Bewleigh at present, though he spends very little time amongst us. You see, his position during the last year has been a very curious one. When a body was found in the river and identified as yours, and buried in the Carew vault, you will understand he came into possession without any difficulty, and was at once known as Sir Francis Carew. But you will have heard, perhaps, that twelve months later it was discovered that the body found and buried was not yours at all."

"No, I had not heard that part of the story," Roger answered; "my information goes as far as the finding

of a body which was identified as mine. By-the-by, whose body did it prove to be?"

"Young Dick Lowry's. You remember him, of course? he was very much like you in appearance."

"Yes, I remember him. I am sorry to hear he is dead."

"The truth is, he caught cold searching in Beaver Woods for you, which developed quickly into pneumonia, and by the end of the second day he was dead."

"Ah, now I understand," Roger answered; "but still I am at a loss to know how it was discovered twelve months later that his body had been substituted for mine!"

"Ah, well, that is a longish story; let me begin at the beginning. Dear me, how strange it all seems! I can scarcely realise that you have come home again. Of course you are Roger; but you are changed—greatly changed." And the rector filled a pipe and lighted it quite unconsciously, and after two or three whiffs laid it in the fender, and came again and looked into Roger's eyes.

"You will excuse me, my dear young friend," he said, "but really I am so excited at your coming back that I hardly know what I am doing or saying."

You were going to tell me," said Roger, smilingly, "how it came about that you discovered that young Lowry's body had been substituted for mine."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the rector. And he began at once at the beginning, and told the whole story of Davy's confession, and of the proceedings that were afterwards taken.

"And my uncle raised no objection?" Roger questioned.

"None in the least; in fact, no one seemed more surprised than he when it was discovered that the body in the vault was that of Lowry."

"Meanwhile, you say Jacob had left the place?"

"He departed secretly after what was believed to be your funeral, and while the captain was away in London. He went away in the night-time, and no one was able to trace him, and, as far as I am aware, he has not been heard of since. Whether he has left the country, or whether he is still in England, no one seems to know."

"But how about my uncle's claim to the title and estate when he had no legal proof that I was dead?"

"Ah, that is just it!" said the rector. "As I told you a few minutes ago, for the last year his position has been a very anomalous one, and I don't think that he has disguised from himself the fact that at any time there was the possibility of your turning up."

"But I presume he has appropriated the rents all the same?"

"Well, I presume so. You see, he was the man in

possession, and as long as you did not turn up his claim seemed safe enough. Possession being nine points of the law, he took the tenth for granted, don't you see."

"And has he been behaving well?" Roger questioned.

"Ah—well, as to that matter one cannot say much. He spends so little time at Bewleigh. During the season he goes to his London house, then early in the spring he went to Monte Carlo, and there are reports that he gambles, and that he has mortgaged the estate for all it is worth."

"He is not married, I presume?" was Roger's next question.

"Well, no. It is reported that he proposed to Miss Kitty Bolitho, and that she declined the honour."

"Ah! And Kitty is still unmarried?"

"She is. She and my daughter Dorothy have become fast friends. But, excuse me, Roger, this is a very one-sided conversation. I am giving you all information about St. Mullion and the people here, but you have told me nothing about yourself."

"Ah, that is a very long story," Roger answered, with a laugh; "but if you care to listen I will give it to you, and then we will go and interview my uncle."

For the next half-hour Roger talked, while the

rector listened with knitted brow and wondering face. He made no remark during Roger's recital, but when he had completed the story he rose at once to his feet.

"We must go at once," he said—"not a day longer must your uncle remain in possession." And, taking their hats, the two men left the house, and strode away in the direction of Bewleigh.

CHAPTER XXIV

ST. MULLION BELLS RING OUT

A WANING moon was rising slowly over the trees when the two men left the rectory, and in the valley and up the hillsides a white mist lay—almost the first intimation that summer was nearly over, and that autumn was near at hand. For some little distance they walked on side by side in silence; then the rector paused suddenly, and said—

“Suppose, Roger, we call on Mr. Bolitho? It will not be very much out of our way.”

“Why should we call on him now?” Roger questioned.

“Well, the truth is I have great faith in Mr. Bolitho’s judgment.”

“Indeed?” said Roger, in a tone of surprise.

“Ah! my young friend,” laughed the rector, “your going away has been a blessing in disguise in some respects. It has brought, for instance, the Church people and the Dissenters more closely together.”

“Is that so?” Roger questioned.

"It's a sober fact, and I am very glad of it," went on the rector. "Why, Miss Kitty Bolitho and my daughter Dorothy are now almost inseparable, and I find it a very pleasant thing myself to run in and see Mr. Bolitho every now and then and have a chat with him."

"I am very glad to hear it," Roger said with a smile.

"You know I used to think he was narrow and exclusive and bigoted," went on the rector; "but I have formed a very different opinion of him."

"Indeed?"

"Of course his politics I still detest, and I expect I always shall do so," the rector went on; "but we will not discuss that now. At any rate I have found Mr. Bolitho an invaluable friend, shall I say, during the last two years. In all those matters that came up during your absence I consulted him in everything, and I have found that his advice has always been sound and worth following."

"In that respect your opinion coincides with mine," said Roger; "for you know before I went away I used to call often at Trevisco."

"Yes, I know. And I hope some day, between us, Roger, to get Mr. Bolitho and all his family over to the Church."

"I am afraid that is rather a large order," laughed

Roger. "But to come back to the point at which we started. If we were to call on Mr. Bolitho now, he would naturally expect that I should tell him everything."

"Not necessarily," said the rector.

"Well, he would think it strange if I kept back anything. And really I am very anxious to shield my uncle as far as possible. I do not want his treatment of me to become common property. I am going to visit him in no spirit of revenge. I am anxious rather that he shall learn that wrong-doing brings its own punishment."

"I quite appreciate your feeling, Roger, though I am not quite certain that it is a right one; nevertheless, your confidence would be quite safe with Mr. Bolitho."

"I do not doubt that," Roger answered slowly; "and really, if you think I ought to take him into my confidence, I will do so. But you must remember the captain is my uncle, my father's only brother, and I am anxious as far as possible to screen the name of Carew from open shame."

"I still think," said the rector, "that we should do wisely in calling at Trevisco. It is quite early in the evening yet."

"As you will," said Roger. "Of course, I should call upon Mr. Bolitho to-morrow, but if you think we had better go to-night, I will fall in with your wishes."

A few minutes later they were standing at the door of Trevisco, waiting for it to open.

"Is your master at home?" questioned the rector, when the servant opened the door.

"Yes, sir; he is in his study."

"Very good; you need not tell him I am here," said the rector. "We will go at once to his room." And he hurried up the stairs, followed by Roger.

In response to his knock there came a cheery "Come in." And Mr. Penderry pushed open the door and entered, closely followed by Roger. Mr. Bolitho rose quickly to his feet at the sight of the rector; but the next moment, seeing Roger behind him, he rushed past the rector and caught Roger's hand, and for a moment or two seemed too overpowered to speak. He had recognised the young squire in a moment in spite of his changed appearance.

"Heaven be praised!" he said at length. "I have always cherished a hope."

"And you never gave me quite up for lost?" Roger questioned, with a smile.

"Ay, once I did," said Mr. Bolitho, wiping his eyes—"once I did; but of late I have had an impression that I could not shake off that you might still be living somewhere, and might turn up at any moment. But sit down while I tell the others you are here."

"No; please do not tell them just now," Roger said.

"I am glad to hear from the rector that you are all well; but I have not visited my uncle yet, and I am anxious to see him without delay."

The next moment the door was thrown suddenly open, and Rex bounded in, not knowing that his father had company. He stared from one to another, and for one or two moments his eyes rested on Roger with a curious look of perplexity; then, rushing forward, he exclaimed—

"Why, surely you are Roger?"

"Of course I am," Roger answered. "Who did you take me for?"

"Well, for the moment I could not make you out. But, really, are you still alive?"

"I am here in the flesh, Rex, and delighted to see you."

"Delighted!" replied Rex—"why, that isn't the word for it! When did you come?"

"I stole like a thief into St. Mullion," laughed Roger, "after the sun set, and no one outside this room knows I am here."

"But, goodness me, they soon will know!" laughed Rex. "We will have a general holiday at St. Mullion to-morrow."

"No, please don't make a fuss over my homecoming," pleaded Roger, "for there is more pain in it than gladness. If my father were only alive we would

keep holiday. But come, Mr. Penderry, ought we not to be moving towards Bewleigh?"

"Not yet, surely," said Mr. Bolitho; "why, you have told us nothing of all your adventures since you so strangely disappeared. I am curious to know, at any rate, what has happened to you since we saw you last."

"Some day I will tell you," Roger said, with a pathetic smile; "but it is a very long story, and I am rather impatient to see my uncle."

"As you will," Mr. Bolitho answered; "but we have been impatient for two long years and more to know the secret of your strange and sudden disappearance."

"Will you not go with us to Bewleigh," said the rector, "and Roger will enlighten you on the way?"

"I think I would prefer not," said Mr. Bolitho; "I have no particular wish to see the captain."

"Nevertheless, as I have promised to accompany Roger, I should be glad if you would accompany me."

"Are you afraid of consequences?" laughed Mr. Bolitho.

"Well, I fear I am not a particularly courageous man," said the rector; "and, you know, the captain, when he is excited or angry, can be rather a dangerous customer."

"But surely he will not be angry at the sight of his nephew?" said Mr. Bolitho.

"Well, it is just possible that his pleasure may not be altogether unmixed with regret," the rector answered, in the same tone of banter.

"If you particularly wish it, of course I will go with you," said Mr. Bolitho; "but, you know, I have not been in the habit of visiting at Bewleigh since the captain took possession."

"I know, I know; but I should be glad all the same if you could come along with us. We might take counsel together on the way."

"You can tell your mother, Rex, where I have gone to," said Mr. Bolitho. And he at once went and opened the door and led the way. The others quickly followed. They met no one in the hall, and passed out of the house without any other member of the family seeing Roger. The rector and Mr. Bolitho were so excited that they did not notice in passing the drawing-room door a voice within singing very plaintively and sweetly the old song, "Strangers Yet." Not so, however, Roger; he recognised the voice of Kitty, and it touched his heart to tenderness in a moment. Mr. Bolitho was holding the outer door open and waiting for him. In another minute they had passed out into the still moonlight, and were walking slowly in the direction of Bewleigh.

"Now, Mr. Bolitho," said the rector hurriedly, "it is only right that you should know that Roger has not

been absent from home all these months simply to please himself."

"I think I scarcely need to be told that," said Mr. Bolitho. "I think I know Roger pretty well."

"And you will understand," said the rector, "that his uncle was interested in his absence, and would have profited by his death."

"If I understand anything," said Mr. Bolitho, shortly, "it is that the captain devised the means of making away with him, and that in some way or other the plans miscarried, and Roger has escaped with his life."

"That is the whole truth put into a nutshell," said Roger; "but you will understand, Mr. Bolitho, that I do not want to make my uncle's disgrace public property. He is a Carew, and for the sake of my father I would like to screen him all that I possibly can."

"I do not think it is either wise or charitable to screen such an individual," said Mr. Bolitho shortly.

"Perhaps you are right," Roger answered. "Nevertheless, I hope you will respect my wishes all the same."

"Of course we will—of course we will," Mr. Bolitho said quickly; and then for some considerable distance they walked in silence.

Meanwhile Rex had rushed into the drawing-room, where his mother was sitting with needle in hand

engaged in some fancy-work, while Kitty sat at the piano singing some old songs, which brought back vividly the memory of days and years gone by.

"Ay, Kit!" Rex exclaimed, "who do you think has been with father in his study?"

"I thought I heard the voice of Mr. Penderry," Kitty replied.

"Yes, he has been here, but he had some one with him."

"Not Dorothy, of course, because I left her not an hour ago at the rectory gate."

"No, not Dorothy; but some one you know very well."

"Perhaps Mrs. Penderry was with him."

"You don't suppose she would go into the study and leave you here, do you?"

"Well, it would be hardly likely," said Kitty, with a smile.

"Well, I am sure you will never guess," said Rex, with a smile, "so I had better tell you at once."

"Oh, I don't suppose it was any one whom I am interested in," Kitty replied, turning over the leaves of her music, while Mrs. Bolitho lifted her eyes from her sewing and looked at Rex curiously through her spectacles. She saw in a moment that he was greatly excited about something. His eyes gleamed, and his lips were almost quivering.

"I think you had better get out with it at once, Rex," she said, with a laugh, "for I see that you are almost bursting to tell."

Then Kitty swung herself round on her music-stool, and looked eagerly at her brother. She saw also that something unusual had happened. His face was very much paler than usual, while his eyes gleamed like coals of fire.

"Why, what has come to you, Rex?" she questioned; "you might have seen a ghost."

"I have seen something more wonderful than a ghost," he replied; "I have seen Roger Carew."

Instantly Kitty was on her feet, her whole frame trembling with excitement, while Mrs. Bolitho pulled off her spectacles and stared at her son.

"It's quite true," Rex went on. "I went into the study to see father, not knowing any one was with him, and who should I come upon but the rector and Roger."

"You are quite sure it was Roger?" Mrs. Bolitho questioned.

"As sure as I am that I am myself," he answered. "He has altered considerably, it is true; he is dressed in a rough sailor suit; and, would you believe it, he wears a beard; but he is the same Roger, and a good deal handsomer than he used to be; but I recognised him in a moment."

Kitty sat down again and breathed hard. A dozen

thoughts flashed through her mind in a moment. Roger was alive—that was the first fact, and it set her heart thrilling with a strange and inexpressible joy. But a second thought quickly followed. He had come to the house, and he had not inquired for her. He had spent some time with her father, and he had gone away without asking either after her mother or herself. What did it mean? Had Roger forgotten her? Had his love died out? Had he reached the position now that he did not care? It really seemed so. At one time Roger would never have come to Trevisco without inquiring for her. Now, after an absence of two years—coming back as one risen from the dead—he had spent some time in the house, and had gone away, and she had never seen him. Then other thoughts followed in quick succession, some of them pleasant, some of them perplexing, and some of them charged with a considerable amount of pain.

“It seems strange that he should have hurried away in this fashion,” said Mrs. Bolitho, voicing the feeling that was in Kitty’s heart.

“The truth is he wanted to relieve his uncle’s anxiety,” said Rex, with a laugh.

“And do you think his uncle will be very much relieved?” questioned Mrs. Bolitho.

“I think he will be very much astonished,” Rex answered.

"But where has he been all this time?" Kitty questioned, "and why did he go away?"

"I don't know," Rex said. "There is a mystery at the back of all that, and he does not seem anxious to explain what it is."

"Then it is possible that he may have gone away of his own accord?" Kitty questioned.

"It is possible, of course," Rex replied; "but I don't think it is probable."

"Then what is your solution?" his mother asked.

"Well, you know that Roger is a high-spirited fellow. Moreover, he has great reverence for his family and his ancestry, and I fancy even if his uncle did anything dastardly he would like to keep the matter quiet."

"But he is sure to tell the rector," said Mrs. Bolitho, "and he will have great difficulty in keeping it from other people."

"There you are mistaken, mother. If the rector has been told as a secret, you may depend upon it he will not divulge it."

"But if Roger has suffered wrongfully, those who have wronged him ought to be punished," said Kitty, indignantly.

"That is a matter that he must decide for himself," said Rex, with a laugh. "But they will have got to Bewleigh by this time, and the captain will know that he is no longer the squire; so I am off into St. Mullion

to tell the folk. We'll have all the bells ringing in less than half an hour, and the parish shall know that the rightful heir of Bewleigh has returned to claim his own."

"Don't be hasty, Rex," said his mother. "I am sure that Roger would not care to have a fuss made."

"No; he hates a fuss," Rex replied. "But other people are differently constituted; and we are not to be deprived of our share in the fun because he is of a retiring disposition."

"It seems almost too strange to be true," Kitty remarked slowly, with a dreamy look in her eyes. "I can hardly realise yet that Roger has come home."

"I can realise it all right," said Rex, "for I have seen him, so I'm off." And without further words he hurried out of the house.

In less than ten minutes he was walking down the Fore Street of St. Mullion. Richard Cobbedick was the first man he saw. Pushing his head in at the door of Richard's shop, he said—

"Richard, do you know that the young squire has come home?"

"The young squire!" said Richard, rising suddenly to his feet.

"Ay; Roger Carew returned home this evening to claim his own."

" You don't mean it ? " said Richard.

" It's the solemn truth," said Rex.

" Goodness gracious ! " said Richard. " But there, I always said that that was a stupid verdict of ' Found drowned.' There was never no sense in it from the beginning, and I always stuck to it." And Richard's chest began to swell with pride.

Peter Mudge from his own shop heard Rex's voice, and came out to know what it was all about. Then their wives were informed of the great event, and they rushed off at once to tell their neighbours. Rex hurried down the street telling every man he met, and calling at the houses of the bell-ringers to say that the heir of Bewleigh had returned, and that they ought to give him a good peal of welcome before he slept.

Outside the Blue Anchor was constable Polkinghorne, who was next informed of the joyful event, and the constable trotted off at once in the direction of Bewleigh, so that he might have what he termed " official information."

Within the space of half an hour the old belfry-door was thrown open, and six stalwart men were pulling at the bell-ropes with might and main. When the merry clang of the bells stole out over the valley and across the quiet fields, those who were not in the secret opened the doors of their houses and wondered why the bells were ringing so merrily. For years past such a

wild revel of bells had not been heard in the parish of St. Mullion. Of late there had been too many muffled peals. But at length they had broken out into a joyous clamour again, and those who did not know wondered what it was all about.

When Roger and his two companions reached Bewleigh they were shown at once into the library, while the captain was informed by the servant that the rector and two other gentlemen wished to see him.

"Bother the rector!" said the captain tartly, looking at his watch. "I wonder what he can want here at this time of night."

The captain was busy with certain papers, the study of which did not seem to afford him satisfaction.

"Tell the rector that I will be with him in a few minutes," he said to the servant; and he sat down again at the table.

"He is evidently in no hurry to see us," said Mr. Bolitho, fidgeting uneasily.

"He would be in much less hurry," said the rector grimly, "if he knew what was in store for him."

Roger stood leaning against a revolving bookshelf, looking distressed and ill at ease. He felt that the encounter with his uncle must necessarily be a very painful one. Moreover, to be in the old home again—the home that was his by right, the place where he had spent all his early life, the scene of his boyish joys

and sorrows—caused a thousand tender and pathetic memories to sweep over his heart. More than once he had brushed his hand across his eyes as the unbidden tears came to the surface.

To stand in the old home again and to remember that his father was dead, and his place was usurped by his uncle, who had plotted to take his life, was as the bitterness of death to him.

And still the minutes travelled slowly on, and still his uncle delayed his coming. Mr. Bolitho grew more and more fidgety, while the rector became so impatient that he got up and began to walk about the room and to examine the books. Suddenly a step was heard on the tessellated pavement of the hall outside.

"That is my uncle," said Roger to himself. "I should recognise his footstep anywhere." In another second the door-handle was turned and the door was pushed slowly open, and the captain entered, carrying himself with his most dignified and military air.

CHAPTER XXV

PLEASURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

ROGER was standing far back in the room in the shadow when the captain entered, so that he noticed him the last. He shook hands very stiffly with the rector, bowed in his most frigid manner to Mr. Bolitho, and then turned his attention to the stranger. Roger advanced toward his uncle, until he stood where the light fell full upon his face, and then came a moment of awful and ominous silence.

"You do not appear to recognise me?" Roger said slowly, making a tremendous effort to steady his voice.

The captain started, and his face became as bloodless as that of a corpse.

"Recognise you?" he said, in gasps. And he drew his hand across his eyes as though he would shut out the sight.

"I think you had better not pretend that there is any doubt in the case," Roger said bitterly.

"I pretend nothing," said the captain, making a great

effort to recover himself; "you are Roger." And he sank heavily into a chair.

"It is but a cold welcome you give me," Roger said, in the same biting tone. "You might not be the least pleased to see me."

"Go on," said the captain, bringing out the words painfully; "you've got the upper hand now."

"Then you admit that your game is up?"

"I do. I have been shamefully betrayed, but I've had my slice out of Bewleigh."

"For which, no doubt, you feel thankful."

"I do. And if you had stayed away another fortnight I would have had more. But what do you intend doing now you have come back?"

"That will depend on circumstances. I had hoped that you would have shown a different spirit."

"Did you think I should welcome you with tears of gratitude? I know what your reappearance means. But remember, I never lifted a hand against you."

"No; you had others who would do that for a consideration."

"And you have told everybody, of course."

"These gentlemen know. I felt that my safety depended on some one knowing. But they will neither of them tell till I give them permission."

"Indeed? How very considerate!"

Roger flushed angrily.

"I think you should be the last man to talk about consideration," he said.

For several seconds the captain fidgeted uneasily in his chair; then, assuming a much humbler tone, he said—

"May I not talk with you alone?"

"Most certainly not," was the prompt reply.

"Then may I ask if you have taken, or intend to take, legal action?"

"I must decline to answer that question. But I may tell you this—that everything will depend on your good behaviour."

"It is rather late to turn a man out of house and home," he whimpered, pulling out his watch.

"I have no intention of turning you out. You can stay here till—till other arrangements have been made."

"Other arrangements, eh?" And the old bitter tone came back into his voice. "Yes, that is a very polite way of putting it. But let me at least make arrangements for your comfort. I will order supper at once"—and he left the room before any one could reply, and closed the door behind him.

"He is a strange character," grunted Mr. Bolitho, when he had gone.

"Very strange," assented the rector.

"I believe he thinks I am going to give him into custody," said Roger.

"And if I were in your place I should do so," said Mr. Bolitho. "In any case, I would not be in the house alone with him."

"I am not afraid," said Roger. "He is too completely handicapped to attempt any further trick."

"Don't be too sure of that, Roger," was the reply. "You can see that the man is desperate, and desperate men will sometimes do strange things."

"He does not strike me as being greatly alarmed," said the rector after a long pause. And then silence fell again.

The rector got up at length, and began to walk about the room once more, and after a while Mr. Bolitho followed suit.

Then they sat down again, and looked curiously at one another.

Roger was quick to interpret their looks, and after a while he went to the bell and rang it.

"Where is your master?" he said to the servant when she appeared.

"I do not know, sir; I thought he was here."

"Has he not ordered supper to be laid?"

"I think not, sir. I have heard nothing of any such order."

"That is curious!" said Roger. "Will you send the housekeeper here, and meanwhile see if you can find your master?"

The maid departed, and a few minutes later a stout, middle-aged woman came deferentially into the room. Roger gave a little sigh. It was evident that all the old servants had been dismissed.

"You are the housekeeper?" Roger questioned.

"I be," she answered bluntly; "and may I ask who you be?"

"Well, you may. It is a very proper question. I am Roger Carew."

"What?" she exclaimed, "the young squire as disappeared?"

"The same."

"Is this the truth, or ain't it?" she said, turning to the rector.

"It is the truth," the rector answered, with a smile.

"Then Sir Francis is no longer master here?" she asked, gasping and trembling.

"That is also the truth," was the reply.

"Goodness gracious!"

And the woman leaned her back against the wall and panted.

Meanwhile, search was being made throughout the house for the captain, but without avail; and at length the servant returned to say that the captain was not in the house.

"Has any one heard him go out?" Roger questioned.

"I think not, sir," was the reply.

"Then he must be somewhere about." And Roger instantly instituted a search on his own account.

He found the captain's bedroom in a state of considerable upset. A number of drawers were wide open, and several articles of attire were scattered about the room.

Then Roger hurried to his own room, and for several moments he sat down nearly overcome. It almost seemed as if no one had been in the room since he went away. Everything was just the same as he remembered to have left it, even to the position of the brushes on the dressing-table. He got up at length and opened the wardrobe, and found stocks of clothes neatly folded as he had left them.

"I shall be able to have a change to-morrow, at any rate," he said, with a smile, "and I shall not be sorry either."

Then he went to the other rooms. How familiar everything seemed! And yet at every point he missed his father, and the sense of his loss came to him more and more! He almost forgot the captain as he wandered along the broad corridors.

At that moment the bells of St. Mullion clashed out on the still air, and a moment later a wild revel of bell-music seemed to fill all the place.

"I wonder what is the meaning of that?" he said,

pausing in his walk, while a questioning look crept into his eyes.

The next moment the rector came upon him.

"Do you hear the bells?" he said excitedly. "They know in St. Mullion, depend upon it. But don't they ring out to-night! I feel as if I wanted to dance to the tune."

Roger brushed his hand quickly across his eyes, for this welcome home from the belfry touched him to the quick.

"Do you know," he said huskily, "I cannot find my uncle anywhere? I don't quite understand it."

"Oh, but he is gone," said the rector.

"Gone?" Roger questioned.

"Ay; cleared out, to put it vulgarly. Mr. Bolitho and I have been to the stables, and the groom says that he rode away half an hour ago."

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Roger.

"He told the groom that he had been summoned to Bristol on important business," went on the rector, "and he has ridden away on the best horse in the stables."

"I am sorry he has gone," Roger said. "I wanted him to see that I had come back in no spirit of revenge."

"I don't think he was afraid of you," the rector replied. "But he would not care to face St. Mullion

again. Besides, if he has any conscience at all, or any sense of shame, to be under the same roof with you would be torture."

"I don't think that would trouble him. But come, let us go downstairs and see what refreshment there is to be had."

The housekeeper had quickly recognised the authority of the new master, and in the morning-room a very appetising meal had been spread.

Mr. Bolitho was in the hall when they came downstairs, talking to constable Polkinghorne. The constable bowed most respectfully to Roger, and then held out his hand to shake hands, deeming that the proper thing to do. Roger grasped the outstretched hand in a moment.

"I'm glad to see you again, Polkinghorne," he said.

"And I be terrible glad to see you, sur," said the constable; "terrible glad, sur; and there's no use denying it."

"I suppose you were anxious to make sure that report spoke truly?" the rector questioned.

"That is so, sur. I said to Mr. Rex Bolitho that I must get 'official information,' I must, and so I comed right away here."

"Well, now you have got the 'official information,'" laughed Roger.

"And I be satisfied, sur; and much luck to you, I do

say! But might I ask if you require my services in any way?"

"Not in any way, thank you, Polkinghorne," Roger replied cheerfully.

"All the same, I'll keep an eye on the place, sur." And Polkinghorne slowly bowed himself out.

Over the supper-table the three men had what they called a good time. Roger was the least cheerful of the three. The brightness of the present was constantly shadowed by the memory of the past.

Before his guests left Roger got them to promise that they would say nothing that would in any way incriminate the captain; and when the door was bolted upon them he went slowly through the great silent house to his own room.

It was a long time before he fell asleep. He had been far more excited than he knew, and now that the tension was over he felt limp and exhausted and too tired to sleep. Moreover, though he lay quite still, memory was busy. The body might be exhausted, but the mind was as alert and active as ever.

He was now, of course, Sir Roger Carew, and master of his own fate, with all that that implied. In his new position he would have to face new difficulties and bear fresh responsibilities. He was no longer the irresponsible youth of other days.

When last he slept in that house he had his father to

lean upon and advise with in any emergency. Now he would have to stand alone, would have to act on his own initiative, and follow his own judgment.

It seemed very strange to be home again, but unspeakably restful and sweet. After all that he had passed through, to rest securely on his own bed once more was grateful beyond all power of words to express.

He fell asleep at length, and dreamed that he was a castaway on a little island in the Southern seas, and that far out in the offing the sail of a ship was descried, and the sailors who had been cast away with him and Dr. Stone were shouting and beating tin canisters, and making a great commotion in order to attract attention. Then a great clash of bells broke out across the water, and he opened his eyes with a start, and as he did so a smile broke over his face.

He was not a castaway, he was safe at home; and outside on the lawn a crowd of people from St. Mullion were shouting their welcome at the top of their voices, and rising above all was the music of St. Mullion bells.

The housekeeper had told the people that the young squire was not up yet, and they had answered cheerily that, as they intended having a full day's holiday, they could afford to wait.

Roger selected from his well-stocked wardrobe a suit

of clothes that he could easily get into, and when he had completed his toilet he looked like his old self again—older, of course, but handsomer, the people said ; but there was no mistaking him.

When at length he opened the window and stepped out on the lawn a great cheer went up that could be heard all over St. Mullion.

Kitty Bolitho heard the cheer, and her lips trembled unconsciously. Other people might go and welcome Roger, and look into his eyes again and hear him talk, while she would have to remain in the background. It seemed very strange that he had never asked for her when he had called the night before. Time had evidently quenched the passion of two years ago.

Roger went into the crowd and shook hands with everybody. Women cried and blessed him, and men shook his hand until it ached. Roger had great difficulty in keeping back the tears from his own eyes. The genuine and spontaneous welcome of these simple-hearted people affected him far more than any formal demonstration would have done.

A few hours later the park gates were thrown open to all the Sunday-school children in the parish, and to every one else who chose to come. There never was a fête in St. Mullion before got up on such short notice. There were games of all sorts, races and wrestlings for prizes, stump orations, gymnastic displays, a fife-and-

drum contest, and when the moon rose in the evening there was a polka-dance on the lawn.

Roger was kept busy from the time the fête began until it ended. He had intended calling on Mrs. Bolitho and Kitty, but there was no opportunity.

Rex and Stanley came across to help him in distributing the prizes to the children; and drank a cup of tea with him in the big drawing-room, and in the outskirts of the crowd he thought he saw once or twice Mrs. Penderry and Dorothy, but Kitty Bolitho did not show herself for the day.

On the following afternoon, however, he called at Trevisco, and spent a few minutes alone with Kitty before Mrs. Bolitho put in an appearance. They were both on their guard, and played their parts with considerable success. Yet neither was sorry when Mrs. Bolitho came to their rescue.

The old frank, free, unrestrained intercourse between them was a thing of the past, neither was perfectly natural. A confession of love that is not reciprocated alters everything. As a man, Roger was bound to accept the inevitable with dignity. To show pique or animosity would betray weakness. Moreover, he loved Kitty too truly to cherish any ill-feeling, but to betray his love again by any word or act was what he was resolved not to do.

Kitty, on the other hand, was placed in an equally

awkward position. For two years or more she had been idolising Roger's memory, and now when he stood before her—handsome, strong, smiling, and with no apparent trace of his old passion—it was as though some one had struck her a heavy blow.

She tried her best to be frank and free with him ; but it was but a make-believe at best. She would have given her life almost for one of his old looks—one of those rare sweet smiles of his that meant so much.

But he was too completely on his guard to be betrayed by any tender look or tone. He was gentle, affable, and studiously polite ; but that was all. There was no allusion to the old days, when they were so much together and so much to each other, no hint that the old affection was as deep as ever.

So for nearly ten minutes they played at cross purposes, and then Mrs. Bolitho came and put an end to their embarrassment. An hour later Roger left the house and journeyed across the park towards Bewleigh. He could not say that he had been disappointed ; the interview had been very pleasant in many respects. In her mother's presence Kitty had been delightful ; and there was no denying that she was prettier even than in the old days.

But it seemed clear to him that her regard for him had not grown during his long absence. Even the sisterly affection she once cherished appeared to be



SHE TRIED HER BEST TO BE FRANK AND FREE WITH HIM.

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dead. They had met and parted as though they were just ordinary acquaintances.

"Perhaps it is better so," Roger reflected, as he walked slowly back in the early September sunshine. "I shall have too many other things to attend to to think of love."

But he little guessed how many things would claim his attention, nor how difficult they would prove.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT CROSS PURPOSES

FOR the space of a fortnight curiosity in St. Mullion was stretched to its utmost limits in trying to discover what lay behind the strange disappearance, the long absence and unexpected return, of Roger Carew. But though the gossips poked their noses into all places likely and unlikely, and debated the matter among themselves morning, noon, and night, the puzzle remained unexplained. No one appeared to know or seemed likely to know.

If the captain was in any way involved, Roger seemed determined to keep the secret to himself. This, of course, every one admitted was highly generous and commendable, and was another proof of his uniform kindness and generosity. Nevertheless, it was very tantalising to be kept so completely in the dark. A few facts, of course, quickly leaked out. It was known that he had been abroad, that he had suffered shipwreck, that he had spent eighteen months along with a portion of the shipwrecked crew upon an uninhabited

island, that he had been rescued in a very providential way, and after many hardships had been able to find his way home.

But how did he get on board the ship in the first instance ? and if it was he who took Mr. Amos Tregurthy's boat and went to sea without either oars or provisions, why did he do so, and where had he been in the meanwhile ? For Amos Tregurthy did not lose his boat until more than a week after Roger's strange disappearance. In fact, the whole question was so wrapped up in mystery that the gossips of St. Mullion fairly ached for some authoritative statement on the question.

That the captain and his two servants, Jacob and Davy, were in some way mixed up in the matter seemed beyond doubt. Davy's confession and Jacob's sudden and unaccountable disappearance lent weight to the assumption that they had a finger in the affair ; and since the captain was directly interested in Roger's death, and there had been no lack of evidence of late that his character would not bear very close inspection, it was deemed probable that he was the instigator, particularly as, since Roger's return, he had taken himself out of the parish of St. Mullion, and no one knew where he was.

During those weeks the Bolithos saw little or nothing of Roger. He appeared to be deeply engaged in trying

to get at the true state of affairs in connection with the Bewleigh estate.

Kitty was greatly disappointed that he did not come across to Trevisco, as in the old days. The sight of Roger, the music of his voice, had stirred her heart as it had never been stirred before. She had in her early maiden days dreamed of a lover who should be possessed of heroic qualities, and she knew that it was the captain's sham heroism that had blinded her eyes for a moment to Roger's real worth.

Now she discovered that it was not in association with a red coat merely that the highest qualities of courage and valour might be displayed; that there was heroism quite as noble as that exhibited on the battle-field, though it might not figure so largely in the public eye. Indeed, it seemed to require more courage to turn the other cheek than to smite back, and to forgive manifested a nobler heroism than to be avenged.

She was a little piqued and disappointed, as other people were, that Roger did not take her into his confidence and tell her the secret that lay behind his long absence, but she felt, nevertheless, that he was acting a very brave and heroic part in screening his uncle. That the captain was at the bottom of it she felt fully convinced; that he had planned to make away with his nephew she did not doubt for a moment; that Roger had escaped in an almost miraculous way she felt

satisfied in her own mind; and the very fact that, in order to screen the name of his uncle, he kept silent day after day, convinced her, if she needed convincing, that he was cast in no ordinary mould, and that the greatness of his nature had not been fully estimated yet, even by those who knew him best.

So day after day, as Kitty thought of Roger, she saw new excellences in him, and her heart went out to him in increasing admiration. The thought that he neglected her, and appeared to have outgrown his early love, did not lessen her admiration for him, but rather increased her regard.

With one exception, Kitty kept her heart-trouble to herself, and that exception was Dorothy Penderry; and even Dorothy would not have been told only that confidence begets confidence, and Dorothy had taken Kitty into her confidence relative to a little trouble in her own life. She had deliberately set herself to win Rex over to her own Church. That she should grow interested in him was only natural, that as she saw more of him she should get to like him was not to be wondered at, that liking should grow into love was what any one with half an eye would expect.

Their love-making was very pretty and straightforward. Rex proposed to her in a brave, manly fashion; and she, in turn, with charming candour, confessed that she loved him, and that she was his for life

so far as love could make them one. But marriage was a serious thing, and she told him that she could not consent to marry him unless he gave up going to chapel and came with her to the church. This, to Rex, was a very grave matter. He had foreseen that there must be some little difficulty, but had resolved that he would not question Dorothy on the matter, that he would not ask her to give up anything that she loved or believed in; that he would not try to lead her away from the Church in which she had been born and reared; that, as far as he was concerned, the question of creed should not come between them.

But now Dorothy had raised it in a very acute form. She was very firm in declaring that she could not in her conscience marry a man who from her point of view was an unbeliever, a schismatic, one outside the true Church. To be unequally yoked together was a very serious matter in her sight, and if Rex loved her as he said he did, then surely he ought to be prepared to make some little sacrifice.

"But, Dorothy," he said very tenderly, "is all the sacrifice to be on my side? Moreover, I should despise myself if I were to go contrary to my conscience, to my honest convictions, even for the sake of winning you. Much as I love you, Dorothy, and I do love you with all my heart, I cannot be false to my convictions, and pretend that during all my past life I have been in the wrong."

"But you do not object to the Church, Rex?" she questioned in her most winsome way.

"No, Dorothy," he said, "I have no objection at all."

"But I do object to the chapel," she said, "and that makes all the difference."

"But I will not ask you to come to chapel, Dorothy," he said; "a matter of conscience to you shall be sacred to me."

"But since you do not object to the Church, why cannot you renounce the chapel," she asked, "and come wholly with me? Let us be one in religion as we are in love."

"I object to no form of Christian religion, Dorothy," he said; "we are but regiments of the same army. But to renounce the Church of my childhood, to say I have been mistaken all my life, to turn my back on my work and my associations, to say that I have been a schismatic, and that all who have worshipped with me are schismatics, is what I cannot do, and if I were to say so with my lips my heart would give the lie at once."

"Then, Rex, I can never be yours," she said; "my faith is more to me than human love."

"As you will, Dorothy," he answered slowly. "But will you not think again before coming to so cruel a decision?"

"It is no less cruel for you, Rex, than it is for me. I have learned to love you with my whole heart. I would give my life for you, but I cannot deny my faith."

"I am not asking you to do so, Dorothy. We believe in the same Gospel and in the same risen Lord."

"But there is only one true Church," she said, "and you are not in that."

"Thank you, Dorothy, but that is scarcely charitable," he answered.

"Oh, I would not say an unkind thing for the world," she answered, with tears; "only this matter is so vital to me, and I love you so dearly."

"But 'love thinketh no evil,'" he said, with a smile, "'nor vaunteth itself. Love suffereth long and is kind; love hopeth all things, and believeth all things, and endureth all things.' Cannot you see that true religion will embrace the whole household of faith?"

"Oh, Rex, you talk reasonably," she said, "but I am sure you are not right."

"And you will not reconsider the matter?" he asked.

"I cannot," she replied—"I cannot!"

"Then here we part, Dorothy," he said, "and may God be with you!"

This was the day after Roger's return, when all St. Mullion was *en fête*. Dorothy had been plunged in

deepest gloom ever since, and in her distress had taken Kitty into her confidence.

"You see, Kitty," she said, "people may be of different faith and yet be the best of friends, but when it comes to marriage that is a very different question. Husband and wife should be one in faith as they are one in love. You know what the apostle says about being unequally yoked together."

"But Rex is not an unbeliever," said Kitty, with just a touch of indignation in her voice.

"But he does not belong to our Church," said Dorothy.

"No, that may be true; but he belongs to the Church of Christ, which is of far greater importance."

But to this Dorothy, though she did not believe it, was silent; and after a while she said—

"I am so very unhappy, Kitty. Can you advise me what to do?"

"Yes; I can advise you without difficulty," Kitty answered, with a smile. "Say 'yes' to Rex, and be happy both of you."

"But—but—" Dorothy began.

"If Rex were an unbeliever it would be very different," Kitty said; "but, you know, he is one in a thousand—always doing good, always ready to lend a helping hand. You ought to be proud to be loved by a man like Rex!"

"I am proud of his love," Dorothy said. "He is so handsome, so manly, and so generous, that I cannot help being proud."

"And yet you make him miserable and yourself also. Oh, Dorothy, Dorothy!" Kitty wailed, with a sound of tears in her voice.

"Why do you say 'Dorothy, Dorothy!' in that way?" Dorothy said, looking at her friend in surprise.

For a few moments Kitty was silent, and then she opened her heart, telling Dorothy all that had passed between herself and Roger in the old days. How now that he had come back he seemed still to take her answer as final, and gave her no opportunity of unsaying what she had said more than two years ago.

So it came to pass that four people in the parish of St. Mullion were playing at cross purposes, and with distinguished success. Rex was resolute and high-minded, and appeared to take Dorothy's answer as final. Dorothy was true to her Church, and proud, and carefully hid what was passing in her mind. Roger kept away from Kitty, and gave her no opportunity, either by word or by sign, of unsaying what she had said before. So four people were kept apart and made unhappy, and the fault lay entirely with themselves.

It was a fortnight after Roger's return. Kitty and Dorothy had taken a long walk into the country to visit an old woman, who lived in a lonely cottage by the

roadside, and who was in sore need of help. It was a brilliant afternoon; the September sun was shining without a cloud, and all the country looked its best. The harvest had been gathered in, but the apple orchards were pictures still. The hedgerows were filled full of late flowers, scarcely a leaf had yet fallen from the trees, and winter might have been far away in the distance.

On reaching the top of the hill on their return homeward, that commanded a view of the little town, they noticed a man leaning upon a stile, motionless as the wood upon which he leaned, and apparently lost in contemplation of the view before him. As they drew nearer, Kitty was surprised to see that he was no other than the Oriental. She could not be mistaken. She had seen Jacob often, and his face once seen was not quickly forgotten.

At the sound of their footsteps Jacob started and turned his head. He recognised Kitty in a moment, but Dorothy he did not know. Kitty hesitated for a moment as to whether she should give him any sign of recognition. She very naturally wondered why he was there, why he had returned to St. Mullion at all.

He had gone away in a somewhat mysterious fashion, and she was not a little curious to know why he had come back. By the time she had come close to the place where he stood her womanly curiosity had overcome her.

"So you have returned to St. Mullion again, Jacob?" she questioned, with a smile.

"I could not stay away longer," he answered, with a strange light in his large dark eyes. "I have come back to tell everything."

"To tell?" she questioned eagerly.

"Yes, miss, to tell. I cannot bear it any longer."

By this time Kitty's curiosity was fully aroused, and she could not help asking the question—

"What is it you have to tell, Jacob?"

"I killed the young master," the Oriental said, with a wild light in his eyes, "and I have come back to pay the penalty."

"Oh, no, you did not kill him," Kitty said quickly.

"But I did," the Oriental replied; "it was I that did the deed along with Davy. Would you like me to tell the story?"

At this point Dorothy interposed.

"Oh, yes, we should like to hear the story very much," she replied. "We have often wondered how it was done, and who did it."

"Don't, Dorothy," said Kitty. But Jacob did not appear to notice Kitty's interruption. Seating himself on the ground, and crossing his legs, he began in a rapid manner to recount the whole story with which the reader is familiar. Kitty and Dorothy listened spellbound—too interested to interpose a word, too

curious to hear the whole story—to let the Oriental know just then that his attempt to murder Roger had miscarried, and that he was home again safe and sound.

Before Jacob had quite finished, Isaac the sexton came upon the scene, and Dorothy at once began to tell him as much of the story as the Oriental had yet told. Isaac was as curious as the rest, and permitted Jacob to tell the whole of his narrative.

At last what St. Mullion had been longing for had come; at last the secret was divulged; at last curiosity was satisfied, and the whole truth of the case was known. When Jacob had finished, he rose slowly to his feet and said—

“Now I go my way to the man who represents the law. He will put me in the prison, and yet I do not care. I have told the truth, and I shall be glad to pay the penalty.”

“But what if we were to tell you that the young squire is alive?” Dorothy questioned.

“Ah, I should say that you were but deceiving me, and adding pain to my sorrow.”

“I would not deceive you for anything,” Dorothy said; “and I would take away the pain that has been crushing your heart so long. Roger Carew is not dead, as you imagine; he is alive and well.”

“No, no, that cannot be,” he said; “I heard his cry

as he fell into the well. Davy pulled the stone over its mouth. He cannot have got out alive ; nobody could get out. I went down again, and all was still."

"I know not how he has got out," Dorothy said ; "but he did get out, and a fortnight ago he came back again, and he is now at Bewleigh, and is strong and well."

"Oh, you must be sleeping," the Oriental said ; "it cannot be so."

"Go on to Bewleigh, and see for yourself," Dorothy answered, "for in a quarter of an hour you may see with your own eyes that we have told you the truth."

The Oriental did not wait to hear another word, but started off with the speed of a panther. In a few minutes he had disappeared in a turn of the road, and Dorothy and her companion looked at Isaac in wondering surprise.

"Well, this are a go!" said the sexton. "But I always knowed in my own heart that we should get at the truth sooner or later." And he rushed off at a swinging pace after the Oriental.

When Dorothy and Kitty reached St. Mullion, nearly every one in the place had heard the Oriental's story, and was discussing it for all it was worth.

That he had spoken the truth no one doubted for a moment, but to make assurance doubly sure Polkinghorne the constable and several others went at once

to Stonehurst to examine the spot indicated by the Oriental.

They found the flag and lifted it, and some miners, who did not object to exploring underground, descended, and made their way through the tunnel, and came out on the beach not far from St. Mullion Porth.

Roger was amazed when Jacob appeared before him, and not a little vexed when he heard that he had told his story to several people on the way. He felt, of course, that there was no use in denying what Jacob had said, the evidence was too convincing. After all his efforts to shield his uncle's name, his shame, at last, had been proclaimed to the world.

The Oriental's joy was unbounded, and he begged and entreated Roger to let him remain as his slave. He would serve him, he said, gladly, serve him faithfully to the end of his life.

Roger, however, would not hear of it; and a week later, with help from the very man he had tried to murder, the Oriental sailed away from Plymouth to his native land.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SILENCE SPEAKS

IF the Bewleigh estate was not mortgaged for all it was worth, Roger found its finances in such a condition of tangle that it took him several weeks of very hard labour to find out how matters stood. Several nice points of law were quickly raised, over which the lawyers made merry. Money-lenders discovered that the captain was not heir to the Bewleigh estates, and never had been, since no absolute proof was forthcoming of Roger's death.

This point, however, was contested, seeing that a doctor's certificate and a coroner's warrant were in existence, both declaring that Roger Carew had been "Found drowned." Hence mortgages that had been effected during the first year of the captain's occupancy resulted very naturally in a good deal of litigation. But mortgages effected after it was proved that the body in the Carew vault was not Roger's were shown to have no legal value whatever. Consequently, such

mortgagees had no claim on the Bewleigh estate in respect to the documents they held.

Roger was inclined to think at first that he had come into a perfectly barren inheritance; but after a while things began to look a little brighter, though he saw that many years would have to elapse before the tangle could be straightened out.

The captain had been true to his instincts all the way through. By the end of the following day, after he left Bewleigh, he succeeded in disposing of his town house and all its furniture, with horses and carriages, and in pocketing the money, after which he conveniently disappeared, and not a trace of him could be found.

One of Roger's first acts was to dismiss the steward—a tool of his uncle—and take the matter entirely into his own hands. Then, finding one of his farms vacant, he took possession himself, first letting Bewleigh on a lease of three years to a London millionaire, who was anxious to have a country residence.

The farm was three miles away from Bewleigh, so that he came very rarely into St. Mullion. Moreover, his new undertakings so filled up his time and his thoughts that he had little opportunity of renewing old friendships.

It was well for him that his work kept him busy, for he found himself constantly longing for a sight of

Kitty's face. Now and then on a Sunday morning, across the church he saw her in the rector's pew with Dorothy, and occasionally he spoke to her in the churchyard, but she did not unbend to him in the smallest degree. Her very love for him made her seem distant and cold. She was afraid that she might betray herself in some way.

"He shall never know," she would say to herself.
"And perhaps in time I shall forget him."

While he would leave her side with a keener ache in his heart, and think disconsolately—

"Kitty cares less for me now than in the old days, but she shall see that I can bear my disappointment without whining."

So it came about that every effort they made to hide all outward expression of their feeling only seemed to add fuel to the fire of their love.

In a few weeks St. Mullion had settled down again to its normal placidity. Now that the secret connected with Roger's mysterious disappearance had been effectually cleared up, and the captain and his two servants had been proved to be what (now after the event) everybody had all along believed they were, there was nothing further to exercise the minds of the St. Mullionites, and they gave attention once more to their own personal affairs.

Of course, Roger, or Sir Roger as he was now, was

often discussed when the gossips met over a cup of tea or a mug of ale. Poor as he was, he granted old Lowry a pension of a shilling a day for the rest of his life, and on the strength of it, and at the earnest request of Roger, the old man had given up the drink and had settled down as a respectable citizen and (as he called himself) a friend of the squire. This act of the young Lord of Bewleigh was naturally canvassed a good deal, but generally with strong approval.

Then, too, the plucky way in which he had taken the management of the estate into his own hands. The letting of Bewleigh House, and the new and scientific methods of farming he was adopting—all furnished themes for a gossip now and then.

"I tell'ee what, neighbour," said Peter Mudge to Richard Cobblewick one evening, as he was putting up his shutters, "the young squire is the right sort, an' there ain't no mistake about it, neither."

"You're right there, Peter," Richard observed sagely.

"Why, they do say that the way he manages things he'll be on his feet again in no time."

"So I do suppose," said Richard. "I 'ear that the rent 'e's receiving from the 'All is a fortin in itself."

"So I s'pose. Oh, bless 'ee, he's got his eyes open, he 'as," Peter went on.

"And to think they brought in a verdict of 'Found drowned!'" said Richard contemptuously. "I do feel

mad every time I do think 'pon it. There was no sense in it, Peter. No sense in it, as I towld 'ee at the time."

"I know you ded, Richard; but there, it have oal come right in the end."

Roger, however, knew nothing of the way people in the parish generally were singing his praises. He went steadily on with his work, and tried his best to forget the past.

"Let the dead past bury its dead," he often said to himself, but unfortunately for his peace of mind, the dead past refused to be buried.

Every now and then he caught a glimpse of Kitty, it might be only for a moment, but it set his heart throbbing, just as it used to do in the old days.

The first Christmas he spent at the farm was almost as miserable as the one he spent in the South Seas. The rain came down unceasingly from morning to night, and the wind blew half a gale. He had contemplated going to church in the morning, but he thought better of it or worse of it.

He stood for a few moments at the open door and then turned back again to the warm fireside, and gave himself up to dreams of what was never likely to come to pass.

So the days and weeks passed slowly away, and winter grew into spring once more, and spring gave

place to summer, and summer in its turn saddened into autumn, and then news was brought to Roger that his uncle was dying in a London garret.

With his usual impulsiveness he hurried away that night to the great City, and after a long and trying search succeeded in finding the address that had been given him.

Up three flights of stairs and in a wretched room he came upon his uncle, but a mere wreck of his former self.

When Roger stood before him, he sat up in bed and stared; too utterly dumbfounded to speak.

"I am sorry to see you in this condition," Roger said quietly.

"And you have come to pry and make it worse," the captain gasped at length.

"On the contrary, uncle, I have come to help you if you will let me."

"Help me? Haven't I been your worst enemy?"

"You have been a worse enemy to yourself. But let bygones be bygones now. We do no good by overhauling the past."

For a while the captain tried to summon his old bravado to his aid, but it failed him in the end, and he hid his face in the bedclothes and sobbed.

By the end of the following week Roger had carried him back to his farmhouse, and had hired a nurse to

wait on him. For a while he rallied, and it looked as if he would get better. But old Dr. Pascoe shook his head from the first.

"He has simply ruined his constitution," he said to Roger. "A man cannot ill-use himself without paying the penalty. He is reaping the harvest now of what he sowed in his youth."

It soon became known that Roger had found the captain ill and in want, and had brought him home.

Of course, there were some who said he was a fool, that he was simply encouraging wickedness, and prophesied trouble as the result. But the majority praised him, and said he was doing a very noble and Christ-like thing.

And when a few weeks later the rector preached from the text, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink," people's thoughts instinctively turned to Roger. There was one man, at least, among them who not only professed Christianity, but lived it !

Kitty could not keep the tears out of her eyes when she was told of Roger's latest action. She had learnt a good deal since those early days when she imagined that greatness and courage were allied only to struggle and bloodshed. A red coat might, after all, hide a coward's heart, while deeds of noblest heroism might be wrought in unromantic ways, and the great world outside might never know.

She sometimes wished almost that Roger would not do these brave and noble deeds. They made her love him in spite of herself—made her feel how blind she had been in years gone by, made her angry and remorseful.

The captain lived until late in the following spring, and then quietly and resignedly passed away. They laid his body in the place where poor Dick Lowry's had lain for a year, and most of St. Mullion came out to see. But there was no demonstration of grief or regret. Only the good are truly missed and mourned.

Meanwhile, Roger had succeeded in reducing chaos to order in the Bewleigh estate. Thrift and economy had begun to work wonders. All pressing obligations had been cancelled, and henceforth everything would be plain sailing. In a little while now, if he cared, he would be able to take possession again of the home of his fathers. For some things he would like to do so. It was his home, the place where he had spent all of his childhood and youth; the place in which he had built his most beautiful castles and dreamed his happiest dreams.

But for other things he had no wish to go back. It would remind him unpleasantly of the past. He might pine for Kitty more than he did now.

So another summer and autumn passed, and Christmas came again. Mr. Bolitho, meeting Roger the

previous day, asked him if he would come and share Christmas dinner with them at Trevisco.

"I shall be delighted," Roger said eagerly, "for I assure you that spending Christmas alone is not exactly lively."

"I should think not," said Mr. Bolitho. "Not that we have much going on at Trevisco, for, as you know, we are simple and homely folk."

"It will be a great treat to spend a quiet day with you," Roger replied. And so it was settled.

Kitty was in a flutter of excitement all the morning, and chided herself endlessly for her foolishness.

Roger came on to Trevisco after church. Dinner was served at two o'clock to keep up a good old custom. After dinner, until seven, every one was allowed to do pretty much what he or she liked. Then an entertainment was to be held in the servants' hall, in which the whole house was to take part.

Stanley quickly forgot himself in a Christmas-book of adventure. Rex excused himself, and went across to the rectory to have a final talk with Dorothy. Mr. and Mrs. Bolitho disappeared somewhere, and were soon wrapped in peaceful slumber, so that by four o'clock Roger and Kitty found themselves the only occupants of the drawing-room.

For a while Kitty sang, while Roger turned over the leaves. She was in the kindest humour, and readily

sang everything he asked her. All the old songs fragrant of other days Kitty hunted up at Roger's request, and for a while it seemed to them as if they were back again in the dear old past, and all that had happened since was but a dream.

The daylight of that short December day faded quickly, and the twilight came upon them almost before they were aware. Roger had to bend over the piano to see the music, and in doing so his face came perilously near to Kitty's brown hair. Indeed, once a stray lock brushed his cheek and set his heart beating at fever-heat.

Kitty played and sang as long as she could see the music, and then for a while she improvised on the piano as the darkness gradually deepened. Roger had drawn up a chair near her music-stool, and in reaching out to turn some music which Kitty could not see, his hand came into contact with hers.

Quickly, almost unconsciously, his strong fingers closed round her small, soft hand. She did not attempt to draw it away. The music ceased, and only the crackling of the fire disturbed the silence of the room.

How long the silence lasted, neither he nor she ever knew, but somehow it was not embarrassing to either. It seemed to reveal all they wanted to know; hand clasped hand, and love spoke through the touch.

The fire crackled cheerfully in the grate, and its pleasant light played fitfully on the furniture, and threw long shadows across the carpet, and left the distant corners dark ; but there was no darkness just then for those young people—winter had given place to summer, and night was lost in day.

"I need not tell you, Kitty," Roger whispered at length, "that I love you still."

"And I love you, Roger!" she answered, in the same low tone.

"My darling!" he said, with a note of questioning in his voice.

"I did not know till I thought I had lost you," she murmured. "Oh, Roger, you do not know what I have suffered!"

"And I have been thinking all the time that you did not care," he said regretfully.

"I have never cared for any one but you," she said, looking up with a glad light in her eyes.

Then he caught her in his arms, and his cheek rested against her sunny hair, and his lips found hers.

"Darling," he said at length, "this is recompense for all." And for answer she let him kiss her again.

The rest of that day was like a happy dream to Kitty, and when at night she laid her head on her soft white pillow, she began to recall all that Roger

had said to her, and, smiling to herself, she whispered, "This is the day of my recompense also."

There were only two people in St. Mullion who felt sad when Roger and Kitty's engagement was announced, and they were Rex and Dorothy.

To all Rex's pleading Dorothy stood firm.

"I will not interfere with you in any way," he said. "I will not ask you to come with me, and when I am at liberty I will go with you to church."

But that was not enough for Dorothy, and Rex was too honest to deny with his lips what in his heart he believed.

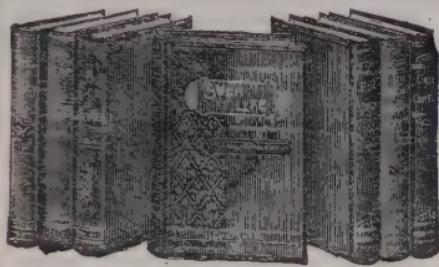
What the future may unfold no one can tell. Rex has given up calling at the rectory, but Kitty goes there often, and Kitty's influence is great. Dorothy tries to glory in being a martyr for conscience' sake; but when she sees Kitty and Roger walking across the park arm-in-arm, the glory seems to grow very dim, and she wonders when the day of her recompense will come.

Rex has one comforting fact to cheer him. He knows that Dorothy loves him, and on that fact he seems prepared to risk the future.

THE END.

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